

Sinnoh League Series Bk 2: Double or Nothing

by Moltke

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Summary: Book 2 in the Sinnoh League series begins with a bang! in Oreburgh City as JT takes place in an unforeseen high-stakes battle that will leave him with double-or nothing. Then one problem after another leaves JT on the opposite side of Sinnoh from Hearthome and the Tradeathon. Will he make it in time? Or will Team Galactic's new plan throw our heroes off track?

1. Chapter 1-Man of Steel

Chapter 1

Man of Steel

"JT! Wait up!"

"Hold it, JT!"

Skit and Volkner yelled after me. But instead of listening to them I sped up, crashed through the doors to the Oreburgh Gym, and slid into the reception counter.

"Is Roark still here?" I asked the receptionist breathlessly.

"Nope, I'm sorry." The guy said, "Roark just left."

"Awww  !" I slumped. Just then Volkner and Skit pushed through the doors after me.

"Goodness, JT!" Skit panted. "You've got to learn to slow down!"

"Ow, my foot! I must've stubbed my toe running after you, JT!" Volkner was hopping up and down while trying to rub his sore foot.

"Do you know when he'll be back?" I asked.

The man shrugged. "He didn't tell me. He might be back this afternoon or tomorrow."

"Can you at least tell us where he went?" Skit asked.

"I'm sorry," The man shrugged again. "Roark specifically requested me not to tell anyone where he was going. I guess he's had so many challengers lately he just wanted a break."

"Can you tell us _anything?_" I begged.

The receptionist frowned, thinking. "Well, I guess I can tell you that he went to go look for fossils."

"WHAT?!"

"He abandoned battling to LOOK AT ROCKS?!"

"I'm afraid so," The receptionist said, shrugging again. "You can try back tomorrow if you like."

"Tomorrow? Awwwwâ€¦" I slid to the ground in disappointment.

"Cheer up JT." Volkner walked over. "At least you have another day to train before youâ€¦"

"OUTTA MY WAY!" A man flew through the gym doors and almost knocked Volkner and me over. We barely jumped out of his way before getting run over.

The man banged his hands on the reception desk. "Has he left yet?"

"I'm sorry sir," The receptionist said with a smile, "if you're talking about Roark, you just missed him."

"Where's he headed?"

"He went to go look for fossils, sir."

"I know that already! Where?"

"I'm sorry sir; Roark gave me specific instructions not to tell anyone."

"I'M HIS FATHER FOR CRYING OUT LOUD! WHERE DID HE GO?"

The receptionist smiled politely and said, "I'm sorry, sir; Roark doesn't want to be disturbed."

"I'M HIS FATHER, I WILL DISTURB HIM AS MUCH AS I WANT! JUST TELL ME WHERE DID ROARK GO?"

Volkner, Skit, and I stood stunned as we watched the exchange.

"I'm sorry sir; if you want you can come back tomorrow. I'm sure he'll be back by then."

"TELL ME WHEREâ€¦"huh?" Roark's dad turned around as Volkner tapped

his shoulder.

"Hello, Byron! Didn't expect to see you here!"

"Volkner! What a surprise!" They shook hands furiously.

"Wait, did I miss something?" Skit leaned over and whispered to me. "Do they know each other?"

I didn't answer because I was too busy racking my brain. Byron looked familiar but I couldn't remember where I had seen him. Let's see, he was covered in dust from head to toe, had on a rag-tag cape, was Roark's dadâ€¦

I snapped my fingers. "I know you! You're Byron! The Canalave Gym leader!" I exclaimed.

"Yep, that's me. And who might you be?"

"These are my friends: JT, from Sandgem Town and Skit, from Hoenn." Volkner introduced us.

"Nice to meet you, JT," Byron had a strong hand shake. "What brings you to Oreburch?"

"JT was hoping to challenge Roark to a gym battle." Volkner explained.

"Yeah," I sighed, "except he left to go look at some rocks."

Byron laughed, "That's my boy!"

His laugh was deep and booming.

"What are you doing here?" I questioned.

"Me? I came to show Roark _this!_" With a flourish Byron produced something from his pocket. It was wrapped up carefully in a cloth.

"What is it?" Skit asked as we all leaned forward to get a better view as Byron unfolded the cloth.

"This."

We all stared at it in surprise.

Skit was the first to speak. "It's a rock."

"Not just any rock!" Byron brandished the rock in the air. "It's a tip of a Kabutops claw!"

"It's a rock," Skit said, voice flat.

"IT'S NOT JUST A ROCK! Do you know what this means? This means that Kabutops were much more wide spread than scientists initially believed! There might've been a whole colony in Sinnoh!"

"Or," Skit said, "It might mean that a Kabutops claw washed on shore from Kanto."

"Orâ€|that," Byron admitted grudgingly and pocketed the fossil. "So, back to you. You came to challenge Roark to a gym battle?"

"Mmm-hmm," I nodded and knelt down to rub Cyndaquill's head. "With my partner Cyndaquill here."

_"__Cynda!"_

"And what about you?" Byron turned to Skit. "Did you come to challenge Roark, too?"

"No," Skit laughed. "Normal-pokemon aren't very affective against rock-pokemon." Silk twined between her legs.

_"__Mrrrrr!"_

"Well, neither are fire-type pokemon." Byron looked at Cyndaquill. "Do you have any other pokemon?"

"Yeah," I said, "A Shinx."

"A Shinx?" Byron started laughing again.

"What?" I frowned. "What's so funny?"

Byron stopped laughing and studied my face. "Wait, you're not joking?"

I shook my head.

"Oh," He rubbed the back of his head. "I thought you were pulling my leg, but I guess you don't know."

"Don't know what?"

"Electric moves wouldn't work against Roark's Onix or Geodude! Only against Roark's Rampardos would electric moves be of any use!"

"What?!"

"Excuse me," The receptionist tapped his desk. We had all forgotten about him. "I you would please continue your conversation outside. Being as Roark's not here I have no reason to stay either. So if you pleaseâ€"?"

"Oh, yeah, sorry 'bout that!" Byron said. "We'll get out of your hair right now!"

In two minutes we were standing out front, continuing the conversation. Well, kinda.

"Why didn't you tell me that electric moves wouldn't work against two of Roark's pokemon!" I burst out at Volkner.

"Well, I, uh, kinda, umâ€|.forgot."

"FORGOT?!" I slumped. "Aw, man, I'm never going to beat Roark now,

not with pokemon that know only fire- and electric-type moves!"

"And normal," Skit poked me in the arm.

I brushed her off, annoyed, "Not like that's going to be much help."

She shrugged. "I'm just trying to be helpful."

I tapped my foot and tried to think. I would have to catch another pokemon before I tried to battle Roark, that much was clear, but I really wanted to battle _now!_ An idea popped into my head.

"Steel is weak to fire, right?" I asked slowly, formulating my plan.

"Of course, son! I'm the steel Gym Leader so I ought to know!" Byron said.

I was quiet for a minute.

Skit gasped. "JT, you're not going toâ€"

I nodded. "Yep, I am." I spun around and pointed at Byron. "I challenge you to a Gym battle!"

Stunned silence fell over our small group. Byron's laugh shattered it.

"What's so funny?" I stamped my foot. "I challenged you! Do you accept or not?"

Byron stopped laughing abruptly and looked at me, suddenly serious.

"I accept your challenge."

Skit and Volkner broke into a well of protests.

"You can'tâ€"

"Hereâ€"?"

"No Gymâ€"

"Or refereeâ€"

"RUBBISH!" Byron interrupted. "Those are just details! I accepted JT's challenge and I mean to battle with him!"

"Yes!" I pumped my fist.

"But, JTâ€" Skit started.

"No buts!" Byron exclaimed. "JT, follow me." He walked off to the side of the Oreburgh Gym.

"Come on, Cyndaquil!" I jogged after Byron, Volkner and Skit at my heels.

I caught up with Byron as he was jiggling a key in a door.

"Uhh, whatâ€?"

"Side door to the Gym," Byron said and swung the door open. Looking at my hesitant face Byron assured, "Don't worry, Roark won't mind us borrowing his Gym. I'm his father after all!" He winked and strode in.

I peered through the side door, Cyndaquill cowering nervously behind my legs. This was the first time I had ever entered a Gym with the intent to battle, and, despite my outward confidence, butterflies flitted in my stomach.

_"__Cynda?"_

I looked down and Cyndaquill met my eyes. We hadn't come this far for nothing! I lifted my head and walked purposefully through the door.

"Whoaâ€|" My voice echoed in the huge space.

"Nice Gym, huh?" Byron's voice met me from where he was standing at the other side of the field. "It's gonna be fun to battle here."

I took a step forward, then paused, scanning the bleachers on either side that were currently empty and the ceiling far above, leaving enough head room for even an Onix to move freely.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Byron yelled. "That thing you're standing next to is the trainer's square! You stand in it while you battle!"

"Oh," I said sheepishly and hopped into it.

Just then Skit and Volkner burst in.

"You can't battle now!" Volkner exclaimed.

"Why not?" Byron yelled back from the far side of the Gym.

"Well, for one thing, there's no referee!"

"Hmmmâ€|" Byron scratched his chin. "I was under the impression that Gym Leaders got crash-courses in refereeing after becoming Gym Leader."

Silence.

"Oh, fine! I'll referee!" Volkner threw his hands up in the air and strode to the referee's box.

Byron looked at Skit, "I suggest, miss, that you sit in the bleachers. It's safer there."

"Oh, yeah, right!" Skit turned slightly red and quickly scrambled into the bleachers, Silk behind.

"The battle between challenger JT and Gym Leader Byron will now commence! It will be aâ€|" Volkner looked questioningly at Byron, who

then looked at me.

"How many pokemon do you have, boy?"

"Uh, two." I answered, unsure of why Volkner had stopped and Byron had asked me that question.

"Two on two," Byron nodded at Volkner.

"It will be a two on two battle, no restrictions! Challenger gets first move!"

"Steelix! I choose you!" Byron threw his pokeball and the massive pokemon emerged with a roar that shook the ceiling.

"Uh, Cyndaquill, go!" I pointed out onto the field.

"__Quill?" Cyndaquill looked at me with a face that suggested I was crazy.

"Yes, you! Now go!" I ordered.

With one last look at me, Cyndaquill bounded valiantly onto the field. When I saw how small Cyndaquill looked against Steelix, my heart quailed and doubts leapt into my mind about whether we would win.

"JT, you have the first move!" Volkner yelled at me when I didn't act.

"Oh, um, yeah!" Well, can't back down now! I decided.

"Cyndaquill, Ember!"

"__Cynda!"

puff!

Steelix didn't even have to move. The tiny flicker of flame didn't make it more than a foot.

Byron laughed. "You call that an attack? Steelix, Iron Tail!"

"__Rrrrraa!"

With surprising speed, Steelix lashed out.

"Cyndaquill!" I yelled.

"__Cyndaaaa!" Cyndaquill went flying and skidded to a stop several feet in front of me.

"C'mon, Cyndaquill! You can do it!" I urged.

"__Cyn-daâ€¦!" It tried to stand, but collapsed.

"__Quillllâ€¦!"

"Cyndaquill!" I yelled in panic, running onto the field.

"Cyndaquill is unable to battle!" Volkner announced. "Steelix wins!"

"Cyndaquill, are you alright?" I knelt beside it and gently scooped it into my arms.

"__Cyndaquill!" It lifted its head a little and looked up at me.

I smiled. "Good try, you deserve a rest."

"Here, I'll take Cyndaquill," Skit appeared by my side.

"Thanks," I placed Cyndaquill softly in her arms. "Take a good rest, Cyndaquill."

"Well, are you going to give up?" Byron yelled at me.

"Not a chance!" I yelled back in defiance. "Nova, I choose you!"

"__Shinx!"

"Nova, Tackle!"

Nova turned and gave me the same look Cyndaquill had: she looked at me like I had lost my mind. But having no other choice, she turned and obeyed, launching herself at gigantic Steelix.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw both Volkner and Skit facepalm themselves and Silk and Cyndaquill turned away.

Hmmm... maybe telling a Shinx to run at a Steelix wasn't the best idea...

"Stand your ground, Steelix!" A smile twitched at Byron's lips.

"__Rrgg,"

"__Shinx!" Nova ran at Steelix with all her might and her attack connected solidly, except... she bounced off.

"Nova!" I yelled. She sat there, shaking her head, obviously stunned.

"Steelix, Iron Tail!"

"__Rrraaaa!"

"Quick, Nova, dodge!" I yelled frantically.

"__Shinx?" Nova glanced up at Steelix's raised tail and launched herself to the side with speed I hadn't known she possessed.

Steelix's tail came down with a crash which shook the Gym to its foundation, obscuring my view of Nova.

"Nova?!"

Steelix lifted its tail and with relief I saw Nova, fur bristling and teeth bared. I sighed in relief. Byron frowned.

I thought fast. "Nova, use Leer!"

Nova's eyes glowed and for a second Steelix paused.

"Steelix, Iron Tail again!" Byron thundered.

"Dodge!"

Nova neatly dodged.

"Again, Steelix! Don't stop until you have it!"

"Keep dodging, Nova!" I yelled in excitement. I was battling!

****THUMP****

****THUMP****

****THUMP****

Each time Nova dodged the attack, but she was tiring out fast.

"ONE MORE TIME, STEELIX! IRON TAIL!"

_"__ROAAARRRRRR!"_

"Quick, Nova, dodge!"

_"__Shinx!"_

I watched in apprehension as Nova tried to dodge but in her exhaustion stumbled. Steelix's attack grazed her—"not much, but enough.

"Nova!" I yelled fearfully.

_"__Shinx!"_ Nova slid to a stop and got shakily to her feet, but kept one paw in the air.

"Can you still fight?" I yelled out to her. In response she crouched and hissed at Steelix. "I'll take that as a yes," I said to myself. To Nova I said: "Get ready to use Tackle!"

"Not so fast," Byron yelled at me, "Steelix, finish it!"

_"__ROAARRR!"_ Steelix's tail began to glow for another Iron Tail attack.

"Nova!" I screamed in panic.

_"__Shinx!"_ She dug her paws in and tried to stop.

"Now,
Steelix!"

_"__GARRRAARRR!"_

BOOM!

CRASH!

_"__Shiiiiinnx!"_

Nova went flying and landed with a sickening thump several feet behind me.

"Nova is unable to battle! Steelix is the winner! That means Byron wins!"

I rushed to Nova's side and lifted her into my arms. "Nova! Are you alright?"

_"__Shinxâ€¦!"_

"JT!" Skit rushed to my side, Cyndaquill and Volkner following behind.

"Steelix, return. Good job." Byron strode over to where I stroked Nova with a gently hand. "Pretty good for your first time against me. Tell you what; if you want, I'll help you train."

"Really?" I looked up.

Byron nodded. "But first, you better take your pokemon to the Pokemon Center."

* * *

><p>"YOU'RE NOT FIGHTING BY YOURSELF! YOU AND YOUR POKEMON HAVE TO BE ONE!"<p>

"FIGHT WITH YOUR BRAINS NOT WITH YOUR BRAWN!"

"BATTLE WITH YOUR WHOLE HEART! DON'T HOLD ANYTHING BACK!"

"DON'T BE AN EMOTIONAL IGNORAMUSE! FEEL WHAT YOUR POKEMON IS FEELING! BE ONE WITH YOUR POKEMON!"

"STEELIX HAS SIZE AND TYPE ADVANTAGE OVER SHINX! YOU HAVE TO USE SOME BRAINS!"

So sayeth the all-wise, mouth-of-thunder Byron. We had been training all day with only a break for lunch. And to rush to the Pokemon Center. I was getting to know the Oreburch Nurse Joy very well.

"Training hard?" She had asked me last time I ran in.

"Yeah," I had panted while she took Nova and Cyndaquill from my arms.

"Well, be careful not to tire your pokemon or yourself out too much. Pokemon Centers can keep a Pokemon going for a while but the trainer also needs rest."

"Yeah, thanks!" I had grabbed my Pokemon and ran back to the Gym.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING? TAKING A VACATION TO LA-LA LAND? STEELIX, BIND!"

I snapped out of it. "Nova, get out of there!" I yelled.

_"__Shinx!"_

But our full day of training had taken its toll. Nova couldn't dodge fast enough and Steelix wrapped her in a ferocious bind attack.

"Nova!" I hollered.

"BRAINS, BOY! USE YOUR BRAINS!"

I could've sworn I heard Skit mutter to Volkner: "What brains?" And Volkner covered his smirk with his hand. Either that or he covered a yawn, which was entirely possible because he had been doing that a lot lately. He had been refereeing all the matches from the referee podium and must've been tired. Or he was trying to give me a hint. Skit had taken to sitting in the bleachers nearby stroking the sleeping Silk.

_"__Shinx!"_ Nova yelled out from Steelix's coils.

I rubbed my eyes and tried to focus on the battle. And thenâ€"it was like a curtain had been lifted from my eyes! I suddenly saw what Byron meant when he said for me to use my brains!

"Nova, use Charge!"

Nova looked at me a minute and thenâ€"she too understood.

"I think all this training has finally made him crazy."

I ignored Skit.

Nova's fur began to spark and glow.

"What are you trying to do? Glow like a Christmas tree? That ain't gonna help you!"

I ignored the taunt and instead encouraged my Shinx. "That's it! Charge up as much electricity as you can!"

_"__Shinx!"_

Doubt flitted over Byron's face. "Steelix! Finish it now!"

Steelix tightened its hold on Nova but thenâ€"a small spark from all of the energy Nova was storing arched across Steelix and it flinched back, loosening its coils just enough.

"Nova, now!"

_"__Shinnxxx!"_ Nova twisted and was free!

Skit gasped. "JT used Nova's small size to escape from Steelix's bind attack!"

"Now climb up Steelix!" I ordered.

_"__Shinx! Shinx! Shinx!"_

_"__Rrrrr?"_

"What theâ€?" Byron was taken aback by my boldness. "Shake it off, Steelix!"

But Nova had already reach Steelix's head. I grinned.

"Nova, jump!"

Coupled with Steelix's height and Nova's speed, she flew through the air, strait toâ€|

_"__Shinx!"_

"The support beams!" Skit exclaimed.

Nova landed neatly on one of the several beams which spanned the ceiling of the Gym, keeping it from collapsing on us.

"What are you doing up there? Hiding?" Byron hollered.

"If I can't win with power, I'll win with brains," I tossed his advice back at him, smiling exuberantly. "Steelix can't reach Nova while she's on the ceiling!"

"Hhn," Byron grunted. "You've learned a lot, JT, in these past couple of hours. More than I could've learnt when I was your age. But you forgot one thing. Steelix, Flash Cannon!"

_ " __GRRRRAARRR!"_

The spinning ball of light hurtled at Nova with blinding speed. Nova and I stared in surprise.

"Nova! Get outta there!" In panic I yelled.

But she was frozen, eyes wide with terror.

****BOOM!****

The attack was so powerful it tore a whole through the ceiling!

_"__Shiiiiinnnxxx!"_

Nova fell from the sky, falling the star she was named after.

"Nova!" I ran forward.

The electric light blinked once, twice, went out. The only light was late afternoon sunlight streaming through the large hole in the

ceiling.

"What happened?" Skit yelped.

"Uh-oh," Byron remarked.

"Nova is unable to battle! Steelixâ€œ"

The lights flicked back on. The door to the Gym burst open.

***"FATHER!"**

"â€œwins." Volkner finished lamely.

2. Chapter 2-The Mine

Chapter 2

The Mine

In thundered Roark. I could practically see the smoke pouring out of his ears!

"WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON HERE? WHY IS THERE A HOLE IN MY GYM CEILING? I THOUGHT I HAD TOLD YOU THAT YOU CAN'T COME IN MY GYM WHEN I'M OUT, DAD!"

"Uh, I must've forgotten." Byron mumbled.

"Really sorry, Roark." Volkner quickly stepped in. "My friend, JT here wanted to train some while we were waiting for you to return and Byron offered to help him out. We're really sorry about any trouble we might've caused." He elbowed me.

"Ow! Uh, yeah, really sorry." I winced and rubbed my arm.

"Huh?" Roark turned around and spotted us. "Oh!" He laughed nervously. "I didn't see you there! Sorry, I wasn't talking to you! You're fine, it's just that the last several times my dad has been in my Gym, wellâ€œ|" He laughed again.

"It wasn't that bad!" Byron protested.

"'Not that bad?' Dad, you almost destroyed my Gym! Twice!"

"Surelyâ€œ"

Roark turned to Volkner. "What are you doing in Oreburgh, Volkner? Shouldn't you be in Sunnyside?"

"They're having a bit of electrical problems in Sunnyside right now."

"Something you couldn't fix?"

"Uh, I prefer to think of it as vacation."

"I know what you mean!" Roark laughed and turned to me. "So, what did you say your name was?"

"JT," I shook Roark's hand. "And this is Cyndaquill." I had already returned Nova.

_"__Cynda!_"_

"And I'm Skit and this is my Delcatty, Silk."

"Nice to meet you JT, Skit."

"So, it's okay that we were training in your Gym?" I asked.

"Totally!" Roark exclaimed.

I smiled in relief.

"I just have one question."

"Uh, what?" I asked.

"What happened to my ceiling?"

* * *

><p>The next day I got up early to do some special training with Cyndaquill. If I wanted to have any hope of defeating Byron or Roark then Cyndaquill had to be able to use Ember!<p>

I thought back to last night. Everyone had been exhausted so after a little more training we went and ate dinner at a restaurant Roark had suggested. Byron and Roark had come too andâ€"when they weren't discussing fossils and the importance of a Kabutops claw being found in Sinnohâ€"they were constantly getting on each other's nerves! Almost like how I used to bug my sister before she went on her pokemon journey. Take this for example: Roark had asked for the salt but instead Byron passed him the pepper.

"Dad! I asked for the salt!" Roark had exclaimed.

"Pepper's good for you, toughens you up." Grunted Byron.

"But I didn't ask for the pepper, I asked for the salt!"

And so on. It was very entertaining.

_"__Cynda?"_

"Right, Cyndaquill," I rubbed my hands in the brisk morning air. "Training. Let's see if you can master Ember. Come on out, Nova!"

_ " __Shinx?"_ Nova yawned.

"No time for sleep now, Nova! I need your help to get Cyndaquill to learn Ember! That way we can beat Byron! Or Roark, whichever will battle me."

The sun had yet to peek over the horizon as Cyndaquill and Nova

squared off across the practice field behind the Pokemon Center. The sky was streaked with pink and yellow and, as a flock of Starly flew overhead, I shouted my command.

"Nova, use Tackle, Cyndaquill, dodge and try to use Ember!"

_"__Shinx!"_

_ "__Cyndaquill!"_

Nova dashed at Cyndaquill, who waited until the last possible second to jump. Cyndaquill was now above Nova and in the perfect position to attack! Cyndaquill took a deep breath and the flames on its back flaredâ€”

Poof!

Cyndaquill barely managed to make a spark.

"Uhhâ€”|" Cyndaquill and Nova had both paused. "Nova, keep using Tackle! Cyndaquill, Smokescreen!"

_"__Cyndaaa!"_

_ "__Shinx, shinx, shinx!"_

A thick, black smoke covered the field and made me cough. I could barely see what was happening but from the sound of things, Nova wasn't scoring a hit.

A light breeze blew and wafted Cyndaquill's Smokescreen away. Sure enough, Cyndaquill was matching Nova move for move, dodging each of her attacks, but unable to get one of its own in.

"Stop!" I ordered. Both of them were exhausted and Cyndaquill's flame was growing low. Panting hard, they obeyed. "This isn't working. Let's try some target practice."

Quickly I gathered some sticks and a few leaflets advertising the Tradeathon and speared them of my sticks then stuck the sticks in the ground.

"There," I stepped back to admire my handiwork. "Homemade targets."

_"__Cynda?"_

_ "__Shinx?"_

"Oh, stop complaining!" I turned to Nova and Cyndaquill. "They'll work just fine!" With a thump one of my makeshift targets fell over. "Uh, well enough, anyway. Cyndaquill, Ember!"

Cyndaquill looked at me once and thenâ€”

_ "__Cynda!"_

Poof

"Uh, try again!"

Poof

"Again! Again!"

Poof Poof **_Poof!_**

Cyndaquill was panting hard.

_"__Shinx?"_

Nova looked up at me.

"Oh, yeah, I forgot about you for a sec, Nova," I smiled sheepishly while she glared at me. "Um, practice tackling the targets, how 'bout?"

_"__Shinnnâ€¦!"_ Nova sighed, then did as I told, running at a target and hitting it head-on.

"Alright, Cyndaquill," I returned to the immediate problem at hand, "try taking a deep breath and build up the fire inside you, yeah! Like that!"

_"__Cynda!"_

"Now let it all out!"

Whish...

A tiny flame flickered then died.

"That's okay, Cyndaquill," I encouraged, "try again, but _feel_ the fire build inside you! C'mon, I know you can do it!"

_"__Cyndaaaâ€¦!"_

The fire on Cyndaquill's back grew.

"Now let it all out!"

_"__Quilllll!"_

Fwooosh

The ground right in front of Cyndaquill blackened slightly.

I sighed. "Nice try, Cyndaquill. It wasâ€¦ bigger. A little."

But we're going to need a lot bigger to defeat Byron, I thought.

_"__Shinx!"_

"Huh?" I turned around. "What are you doing here, Nova? I thought I told you to Tackle the targets!"

Nova yawned, showing rows of tiny, sharp teeth in a bright pink

mouth. She then sat and flicked her tail patiently.

"What?" I turned around and saw that she had knocked down every last one of the targets. "Oh," I sighed and went to set them all up again.

"Alright," I said when done, "this time, use Charge and then Tackle to get your power stronger. And try not to knock them down so fast, please!" I wanted more time to get Cyndaquill's Ember up to strength.

"Alright, Cyndaquill, deep breath!"

Over and over again Cyndaquill tried but couldn't get more than a flicker of flame. We tried all sorts of breathing techniques but none of them worked! I was starting to get frustrated.

A soft nudge on my ankle distracted me.

"What?" I snapped and looked down.

Nova gazed up at me and sat down with a huff.

I peered at the targets I had set up. "Nova! You destroyed them!"

Each of the targets that had taken me so long to make lay on the ground, sticks broken and paper charred.

"Shinx!" Nova reached out a paw and dug her claws into my foot.

"Ouch!" I swatted her away. "No! Bad girl! That hurt! Don't do that!"

Nova scampered away a few feet and looked at me angrily.

"Cynda!" Cyndaquill nudged me.

"No," I crossed my arms, "she was the one that hurt me. I'm not going to apologize!"

"Cynda!" Cyndaquill nudged me nervously.

"No!" I said, ignoring Cyndaquill's warning.

"Shiinnnnx!" Sparks arched across Nova's fur in angry bursts.

"I'm your master; you can't do that to me!" I dug in my pocket and pulled out a pokeball. "Nova, return!"

"Shinx!" All of a sudden Nova launched herself at me. I barely had time to register her glowing form aimed straight at my head before I was flat on my back with Nova's front paws on my shoulders.

Clap, clap, clap.

"Huh?" The sound of clapping made both me and Nova turn our

heads.

Volkner walked up, clapping slowly. "Congratulations, I believe Nova just learned Spark. Not under the best circumstances of courseâ€"I think I would have preferred to stay on my feet." He was smiling.

"Hey," I scowled, "do you think you could laugh _after_ you get this angry Shinx off my chest?"

Volkner shrugged. "You got yourself into it; I think you can get yourself out."

I turned my head to Cyndaquill, who sat a few feet away. "Cyndaquill, a little help, please?"

_"__Cynda," _The little traitor shook its head.

"Fine, since my oh-so-helpful-friends won't help meâ€" I glared at Nova, "get off."

_"__Shinx." _She shoved her muzzle into my face and met my glare with one of her ownâ€"just ten times worse.

"I think she wants you to apologize." Volkner observed.

"But she was the one who tackled me!"

"Sparked you."

"Yeah, whatever; the point is that _I'm_ the one on the ground!"

"Then you better hurry up and apologize, otherwise you may stay on the ground."

"But-butâ€"!" I spluttered.

"Look, JT," Volkner knelt down to look me in the eye; "you and your pokemon are a team. A general can't fight a war without an army. The same goes for you. You can't fight a battle and expect to win if you're not fighting as a _team_. You're not fighting by yourself; you're fighting with your pokemon!"

I sighed. Volkner was right. I was so focused on trying to get Cyndaquill to learn Ember that I totally ignored Nova and snapped at her when she tried to get my attention. It was my own fault that I got Tackledâ€"or, well, Sparked. She even learned a new move and I totally ignored her! How's that for a trainer?

"You're right," I looked Nova in the eye, "I'm sorry I wasn't paying attention and that I snapped at you. Will you let me up now?"

Nova seemed to consider for a moment then, with a flick of the tail, jumped off of me.

"Ouch, thanks," I sat up and rubbed the back of my head. It was a bit sore. Volkner reached down and gave me a hands-up.

"I have an idea," Volkner said, "how about you go train in the

Oreburgh Mine before battling Byron again? I heard there are some strong trainers in there and you could catch a few extra pokemon to help with your Gym battle."

Looking down at Nova and Cyndaquill I inquired: "You guys up for that? A bit extra training and then a Gym battle?"

_"__Shinx!"_

_ "__Cyndaquill!"_

"Alright!" I pumped my fist in the air. "Oreburgh Mine it is!"

A smile tugged at Volkner's lips. "Do you even know where it is?"

"Uhhhâ€¦" I had no idea.

"South side of town." Volkner pointed, "Walk that way and you can't miss it. Good luck. Try not to get lost." And with that, Volkner spun on his heel and walked back to the Pokemon Center.

I looked down at Nova and smiled, "Spark, huh? Awesome. Just don't test out your new moves on me again, please. Save that for the foe!"

* * *

><p>Because a nice construction worker let me borrow his hardhat I was able to go strait into the mine. It wasn't long before I came upon a pokemon.<p>

_"__Geodude!"_

"Nova, Spark!"

_"__Shinx!"_

CRASH!

"Oh yeah! Good job Nova! Return!" I looked down at Cyndaquill, "What number are we at again? Five Geodude, a Zubat, and an Onix?"

_"__Cynda!"_

"Oh, yeah, we defeated two Zubat. Boy, we're just kicking pokemon butt today!" I glanced around. "Let's see if we can find moreâ€¦"

"Hey, you!"

The loud shout from behind made me jump. I spun around.

"Me?"

"Yes, you!" It was a boy about my own age, obviously a pokemon trainer. He continued, "You think you're so great defeating all those pokemon but you won't have a chance against me! I, Colton from Jubilife, challenge you to a one-on-one battle!"

I stood blinking, stunned at the abruptness of it. Shaking my head slightly to snap myself out of it, I hopped into a fighting stance. "I, JT from Sandgem town, accept your challenge! Cyndaquill!" Cyndaquill ran out, ready to fight.

"OK! I'm the challenger so I get first move! Onix, go!"

_"__Orraghrrr!"_

"Alright, Cyndaquill! Think of this as practice for battling Byron!"

"Practice?" Colton yelled. "I'm gonna crush you! This ain't no practice match! Onix, use Tackle!"

"Cyndaquill, dodge!" I yelled. Cyndaquill easily evaded the attack.

"Ha! Can't get away that easily!"

With sudden speed Onix changed direction and scored a direct hit on Cyndaquill.

_"__Cyndaaaa!"_

"Cyndaquill!" I gasped, but it managed to land on its feet. I sighed in relief. "Ok, now use Smokescreen!"

A Smokescreen attack covered the ground and obscured Onix's view of Cyndaquill.

"Grrrrr! Onix, Screech!"

_"__Screeeeeeee!"_

So loud was the high pitched screeching that I clamped my hands over my ears. The sound vibrations broke up Cyndaquill's Smokescreen.

"Awesome, Onix! Now useâ€"huh?" Colton stopped mid-sentence. Cyndaquill was nowhere to be found.

I smiled. "Cyndaquill, now, Leer!"

Onix turned just in time to see Cyndaquill jump up behind it and fix it with a ferocious Leer attack.

"Onix, Rock Throw!"

"Cyndaquill, dodge and use Tackle!"

Cyndaquill easily dodged the Rock Throw and launched into its own attack. But the Rock Throw had hit the ceiling and to my horror a Zubat had been roosting there! It plummeted to the ground.

"Cyndaquill! Save that Zubat!" I yelled.

__Cynda." Skidding to a stop, Cyndaquill changed direction and leaped. Just in time, Cyndaquill managed to grab the Zubat before it hit the ground and the rocks fell on it!

Angrily I turned to Colton. "Watch where you're aiming!"

"So what?" Colton flicked his hand like it was no big deal. "It was just a Zubat and it was in my way."

"It could've been crushed!" I snapped back.

"Whatever, Onix, Bind!"

The abrupt change startled both me and Cyndaquill, who didn't have time to dodge.

"Cyndaquill!" I yelled.

"Squeeze tighter, Onix!" Colton ordered.

__Raaagghhh!"

__Cynda!"

"Cyndaquill! Try to get out!"

Cyndaquill twisted and thrashed, but Onix only squeezed tighter.

"Cyndaquill!"

"Ha, soon it will be all over and I would've won." Colton smirked.

"Grrr!" I ground my teeth. What could I do? No way was I going to lose to a guy like Colton who didn't care whether an innocent Zubat got hurt! But what? I thought back to the last time this happened. Steelix had trapped Nova in a Bind attack just like this one, but Nova had used a combination of Charge and her small size to slip out and climb up Steelix's coils. If only Cyndaquill could do that and launch a full-fledged Ember from close range on Onix's head—but Cyndaquill didn't know charge and its Ember was so weak! Tackle would hardly do a thing against Onix because it was made out of rock! How could I defeat it?

I looked around, trying to figure a way that I could use my surroundings. No ceiling-support beams, no nothing! Just rock, rock, rock, and more rock! How could I? I snapped my fingers. Yes, that was it! But first thing first: Cyndaquill had to get out of that Bind!

"Cyndaquill, Ember!"

__Cynda?" Cyndaquill looked at me questioningly. I nodded.

A flicker of worry passed across Colton's face.

__CyndaaaQuill!"

Poof!

The small flame barely left a black mark on Onix.

Colton blinked in surprise before shaking it off. "Ha! Think that attack will do anything to me? You're weaker than I thought!" He laughed.

I smiled. Just as I thought, as soon as its trainer started laughing, Onix laughed too, a big, booming laugh which shook its whole body.

"Cyndaquill!" I yelled. I didn't need to say anything more. Making itself small, Cyndaquill slipped out of the Bind attack and was rushing up Onix's coils in less than a second.

"What?! How did you get out? Onix, shake it off, shake it off, shake it off!" Colton screamed.

Cyndaquill hung on as the panicking Onix thrashed and bucked, throwing itself into the mine walls to try and mush Cyndaquill. Just what I wanted.

Cyndaquill was holding on for dear life, like a cowboy riding a bucking bronco. Only, Cyndaquill wasn't a cowboy and Onix wasn't a horse.

The walls shook with the force of Onix's thrashing, dust rained down from the ceiling. The Zubat Cyndaquill had saved was fluttering around in panic.

"Cyndaquill, climb onto its head!"

"Smash it!" Colton screamed.

"Jump!"

Cyndaquill jumped, and Onix smashed its own head on the ceiling.

Cyndaquill flew through the air. Now if onlyâ€¦

"HA!" Colton yelled. "Onix, Rock Throw!"

Onix's aim was slightly off and it missed Cyndaquill. But it did hit the ceiling!

"Uh-oh," Colton glanced up at the weakened ceiling.

Cyndaquill landed safely on its feet as large rocks dislodged themselves from the ceiling and buried Onix.

I smiled. "That's two Onix, now."

3. Chapter 3-Father & Son

Chapter 3

Father & Son

"Yum!" _Nom, nom, _"These are delicious!" _Chomp, crunch._

_Chew, smack, _"I didn't knowâ€" _Chomp, nom, _"You were such a good cook, Skit!" _Crunch, shmak._

_ "__Cyndaquill!"_

_ "__Shinx!"_

_ "__Magnemite!"_

_ "__Jolt!"_

_ "__Mrrr!"_

Various sounds of crunching and smacking and chewing and chomping filled the air.

"I don't think store-bought sandwiches count as cooking," Skit remarked, somewhat dryly.

I took another large bite. "Whatever," I said, chewing, "the food is still awesome!"

"No kidding!" Volkner polished off one turkey and cheese sandwich and grabbed another. At the same time Cyndaquill happened to be going for the same sandwich. They reached it at the same time.

"Hey! Hands off my sandwich, pokemon!"

_ "__Cynda!"_

"It's mine!"

A brief tug-of-war ensued. With an almighty tug, Volkner managed to free the sandwich and held it up in triumph.

"Ha! Man defeats pokemon!"

_ "__Choo!"_ Cyndaquill sneezed and a small Ember scorched the sandwich.

Volkner looked at the sandwich, than tossed it to Cyndaquill. "Fine, you can have it. I was full anyway."

Skit and I busted out laughing. Volkner glared at us for about two seconds before joining in.

I stuffed myself full of sandwiches and then sat back as Skit finished hers. Why do girls always take so long to eat?

Suddenly, a flash of purple to the right! I turned my head but nothing was there. Hmmmâ€|maybe I just imagined it.

"JT, c'mon! What are you staring into space for? I thought you wanted to battle Byron again!" Skit and Volkner were standing, ready to go.

"Oh, yeah," I picked myself up off the ground, still keeping my eye

out for whatever had flashed by. "Nova, return."

"Magnemite, Jolteon, return."

"Come _on_ guys! Let's go!" Skit said as she hopped from foot to foot impatiently.

"Ok, coming," I cast one last look around me before following Skit and Volkner to the Gym. As we neared the Oreburgh Gym excitement bubbled up inside me and I couldn't help bouncing on my toes as I walked. I was going to battle Byron! And this time, I would win.

I pushed through the front doors first. The chair behind the front desk was empty.

"Hello?" I yelled as Volkner and Skit walked in. My voice echoed strangely.

"It's empty." Skit said, puzzled. "I wonder where everyone went."

"Hmmmâ€|this isâ€|" Volkner started.

"Oh, there you are!" Roark stuck his head around the corner and made us jump. "I told Byron you'd be coming soon. Come on back, we're waiting for you."

"What about him?" Skit stuck her thumb in the direction of the empty chair.

"Lunch break," Roark waved his hand dismissively.

We entered the Gym. To my surprise there was no longer any debris on the ground from when Steelix busted the ceiling, and all the lights were working just fine. I looked up. The hole was covered with plywood. Byron sat, sprawled on a low seat on the bleachers, picking at his teeth with a tooth pick. He was covered with dust. He sat up as we walked in.

"Ah, there you are, JT!" He boomed. "Just in time, too! The field is now clean enough to battle on!"

"We spent all morning cleaning up the debris so you could battle." Roark explained. Now that I noticed it, he was covered with dust too. "Though, as you can see, the roofers can't come till tomorrow."

"Yeahâ€|sorry about that," I apologized.

"Oh, don't worry. A Gym is meant to be battled in, after all. It just surprised me." He smiled.

"You ready to battle the Master of Steel?" Byron said as he strode over.

"Good luck, JT!" Skit whispered in my ear.

_ "___Mrrrrpp!" _Silk gave me an encouraging rub against my leg.

"Actually," I said slowly, "I challenge both of you to a double battle!"

Silk jumped back, startled. Everyone else stared at me.

"Two on two, a double battle!" I declared. "I'll use Nova and Cyndaquill, whoever knocks out both of the opponent's pokemon wins!"

"But, JT, a double battle with two Gym leaders?" Volkner asked incredulously.

"So what? It'll be just like any normal Gym battle but double the fun! Besides, isn't there a Gym in Hoenn with two Gym leaders?" I kept my eyes locked on Byron and Roark, waiting for their answers.

"He's right," Skit said, "Tate and Liza. They're the Mossdeep Gym leaders."

"Hmmmâ€¦|" Roark stared at me. I held my breath, hoping he wouldn't say no. "Are you sure about this?"

"Totally!" I said. I had thought long and hard about it all day. I wanted to get as many Gym badges as possible and become the best pokemon trainer ever. What better way to do that than have a double battle with two of Sinnoh's strongest pokemon trainers? "I want to become as strong as I can!"

"Hmmmâ€¦|" Roark frowned, deep in thought.

"I'll referee," Volkner volunteered.

"I SAY WE DO IT!" Byron thundered, making everyone jump five feet in the air. "If he's that adamant about battling both of us at the same time, I say give the boy a chance!"

Roark nodded. "Then, we accept your challenge!"

A few minutes later we were standing on opposite sides of the field.

"Go JT!" Skit yelled from the bleachers.

_"__Mrreeoww!"_

"I would cheer for you but as the referee I'm supposed to be impartial." Volkner murmured in my ear on his way to the referee podium.

"No problem," I gave him a thumb's up.

He climbed onto the podium and with a flourish (did he learn that at referee training too?) proclaimed: "The battle between challenger JT and Gym Leaders Roark and Byron will now begin! It will be a double battle, two pokemon on each side, no subs, whichever party knocks out both of the opponent's pokemon first wins! Let the battle begin!"

"Cyndaquill, Nova, go!"

_ "__Cynda!"_

_ "__Shinx!"_

"Bastiodon!"

"Rampardos!"

_ "__BASTIO!"_

_ "__RAMPARDO!"_

I swallowed nervously. Of course Byron wouldn't use Steelix; of course he would pick a different pokemon. _Poof! _Went my strategy, I would have to think of a new one on the dot. Darn! I can't believe something already went wrong!

"JT, your move first!" Volkner yelled.

I clenched my fists. No! I couldn't continue thinking that I was going to lose! Otherwise I would! Nothing went wrong; it was just a little change of plan, that's it, just a change of plan. I would have to start out strong in order to beat them.

"Cyndaquill, Tackle! Nova, Tackle also!"

They both charged. Only problem: they were both headed for Bastiodon.

"No! Don't both charge Bastiodon! One of you get Rampardos!" I yelled frantically. Too late. Shinx tripped over Cyndaquill and they both flipped and stumbled to a halt.

"HA HA HA! Is that all you got?" Laughed Byron. "Ready, son? Bastiodon, Iron Head!"

_ "__Bastio!"_ Bastiodon's head glowed silver and it lunged at Nova and Cyndaquill.

"Quick! Dodge!"

"Not so fast!" Roark grinned. "Rampardos, Zen Headbutt!"

_ "__Ramparr!"_

Nova and Cyndaquill both dodged Bastiodon by jumping to the left, but now Rampardos was headed right at them and they had no way to run!

"Nova! Cyndaquill!" I yelled.

Bam!

_ "__Cyndaaaa!"_

_ "__Shiiiiinxx!"_

They landed with a thump. Both Volkner and Skit winced.

I ground my teeth together. They weren't working as a team! First, I wanted them to attack separate pokemon, then, I wanted them to dodge to each side of Bastiodon, not to the same side!

"You have to be more specific about what you want to do in a double battle!" Skit yelled. "Otherwise you'll never be able to win!"

Skit was right; I needed to be more specific.

"Cyndaquill, Tackle Bastiodon! Nova, use Leer on Rampardos!"

_"__Shiiinnxxx."_ Nova leered.

_"__Cynda, cynda, cynda!"_ Cyndaquill charged.

"Bastiodon, Iron Defense!"

"Rampardos, counter with Scary Face!"

_"__Rampardos lowered a glare equally as fierce as Nova's. On the left side of the field it had turned into a staring fight. Meanwhile, on the right side, Bastion set its feet firmly and its head took on a metallic sheen. Faithfully, Cyndaquill ran right into it, bouncing off Bastiodon's head crest. Cyndaquill probably did more damage to itself than to Bastiodon. Rampardos and Nova were still staring each other.

I groaned and smacked myself in the head. Byron and Roark were beating me and they hardly had to attack to do it! I would have to think of something, fast, or I was going to lose!

Think, think, think! I banged my head repeatedly, as if that would help out some ideas. I thought back to all my training.

"STEELIX HAS SIZE AND TYPE ADVANTAGE OVER SHINX! YOU HAVE TO USE SOME BRAINS!"

"FIGHT WITH YOUR BRAINS, NOT WITH YOUR BRAWN!"

Then, I had used my brains and told Nova to run up Steelix's back, but I wasn't fighting Steelix this time, I was fighting Rampardos and Bastiodon. My mind became a whirlwind of activity. I thought back to all I knew about Rampardos and Bastiodon. Rampardos was a rock type, very strong in attack; Bastiodon was rock and steel, with tremendous defense power; together they formed the ultimate double-battle team. Cyndaquill's Ember wouldn't be of much effect to Rampardos, and even to Bastiodon because it was part rock, (which is kinda good because Cyndaquill still can't do Ember) but Shinx's Spark would actually be normal effective against both. Tackle wouldn't do much damage to either of them so, that's out, but it was the only attack move Cyndaquill knew so maybe I would use it to chip slowly at their HP. Aarrghghhh! Why couldn't they just attack each other!

Wait! I snapped my fingers. That's it! No way would they fall for a simple chase-and-dodge-crash into your own teammate—they were too good pokemon trainers for that—but, if I was subtle enough—

"Dad! I asked for the salt!" Roark had exclaimed.

"Pepper's good for you, toughens you up." Grunted Byron.

"But I didn't ask for the pepper, I asked for the salt!"

Definitely. They might be a good father-and-son team, but they weren't without their differences. Aaaandâ€¦if I could use my pokemon's size against them like I did with Steelixâ€¦

"Bastiodon, Take Down, on Cyndaquill!"

"Rampardos, finish up Shinx with Head Smash!"

Suddenly, I got it. The perfect plan.

"Cyndaquill, Smokescreen! Nova, get behind Cyndaquill!"

__"__Cynda! "__

__Hisssssssâ€¦__went the Smokescreen. In seconds the field was almost totally covered in a thick, black smoke which blocked off light and left my pokemon safe in the dark. Now, to lay the trap.

"Bastiodon, stop! I can't see anything in this murky mess!"

"Rampardos! Same!" Roark said. It was so smoky I couldn't even see Roark or Byron.

"Go JT!" Skit cheered.

"Nova, just like we did with Steelix!" I hope she got the message. "Use Charge!"

Just as I hoped, a faint glow grew in the Smokescreen and steadily became bigger.

"Ha! Using Charge in a Smokescreen? Not a good idea, JT!" Roark grinned. "Rampardos, Head Smash! Aim for the glow!"

"Bastiodon stay still so Rampardos doesn't hit you!" Byron ordered.

I grinned. "Nova, dodge _now_!"

__"__Shinx! "__

Just as Rampardos was about to smash Nova, she jumped from her perch on Bastiodon's head frill. Poor Bastiodon did just as Byron asked and stayed still. Which meantâ€¦

SMASH!

The force of Rampardos crashing into Bastiodon created a shockwave which cleared away Cyndaquill's Smokescreen!

__"__Bastio! "__

"What theâ€"?" Roark exclaimed.

"Bastiodon!" Byron roared. He turned on Roark. "WHAT ON EARTH WERE YOU THINKING?"

"It wasn't Rampardos's fault! It was a trap!"

"Nova, Spark! Cyndaquill, Tackle! On Rampardos!" I ordered, using the chaos of Rampardos attacking Bastiodon to launch my own attack.

__"__Cynda!"__

_ "__Shinx!"_

"Look out!" Byron warned.

"Rampardos, dodge!" Roark said frantically.

Rampardos managed to side-step Cyndaquill's ground charge but Nova jumped and hit it square on the back.

"Rampardos!"

__"__Raaampar!"__

I watched andâ€"yes!â€"sparks flew from Nova to Rampardos.

"Go, JT!" Skit yelled. "You're doing awesome!"

__"__Mrrow! Meow!"__

"Not so fast," Byron said, "Bastiodon, Iron Head! Get that Shinx!"

"Cyndaquill, Smokescreen!" I yelled. Within seconds, smoke once again spread over the field.

"Oh no, we're not falling for that trick again!" Roark said. "Rampardos, get outta the way!"

__"__Raampâ€"|__

Faint sparks flickered in the black cloud.

"Bastiodon, now!"

Bastiodon threw itself at the sparks.

__"__Ramparr!"__

Rampardos flew out of the Smokescreen and skidded along the ground.

"Yes!" I pumped my fist. "Super-effective!"

"Hey! Watch what your doing!" Roark spun to face his father.

"You're the one who didn't get out of the way!" Byron snapped

back.

"Well that's becauseâ€" I saw something click in Roark's mind. He turned and faced me with a grim smile on his face. "That was smart, JT, using Nova's Spark attack to paralyze Rampardos. Real smart. But you're gonna have to work harder than that to beat us!"

"Oh, yeah?" I shot back. "Try me!"

Roark and Byron exchanged a glance.

"Ready to teach this kid a lesson, Dad?"

"Oh, yeah. Let's show JT what we got." Byron grinned. "Bastiodon, Iron Head!"

"Rampardos, Zen Headbutt!"

As one, Rampardos and Bastiodon turned and faced Cyndaquill and Nova. Their heads began to glow. Then they charged.

"Stand your ground," I ordered. Nova and Cyndaquill looked at me like I was crazy. I gave an encouraging nod. "Steady, steady," I murmured as Bastiodon and Rampardos got closer. "Now! Cyndaquill, Tackle, Nova, Spark!"

Without hesitation, Cyndaquill and Nova launched themselves at the oncoming pokemon. If pokemon were cars then Bastiodon would be a bulldozer and Rampardos an eighteen-wheeler. Nova and Cyndaquill would be punch-buggies. They didn't stand a chance. At least, that's what I wanted Roark and Byron to think.

"Now!" I ordered just when Rampardos and Bastiodon were almost on top of my pokemon. "Slip under!"

Like a baseball player sliding home, Cyndaquill and Nova used the momentum from their attacks to slide under Bastiodon's and Rampardos's attacks.

"What theâ€"?"

"Now!"

Cyndaquill and Nova spun with only the agility small pokemon have and launched their attacks from behind. Coupled with the momentum from their attacks as well as Nova's and Cyndaquill's, Rampardos stumbled sideways and tripped over Bastiodon. Together they crashed into a heap, dust swirling around them.

"Bastiodon!"

"Rampardos!"

_"__Bastâ€|"_

_ " __Rampâ€| " _

"Whoo-hoo! Go JT! You got 'em!"

I grinned and flashed a thumb's up at Skit. I had beaten them!

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill squeaked in alarm.

I turned back just in time to see Bastiodon and Rampardos getting to their feet.

"Nova, quick! Use Spark!" I ordered.

_"__Shinx!"_ Sparks haloed Nova as she ran at them.

"Time to pull out all the stops!" Byron thundered. "Bastiodon, Iron Defense! Shield Rampardos!"

_"__Bastio!"_ Bastiodon stepped confidently in front of Rampardos, its head glowing with its defense. Nova's attack bounced harmlessly off.

"Thanks, Dad," Roark flashed a grin at Byron. "Now to repay deed for deed. Rampardos, Flamethrower!"

"Nova, dodge!" I yelled frantically.

She spun and leaped out of the way.

_"__Cynda! Cynda!"_

I echoed Cyndaquill's thoughts. "Nova, your tail's on fire!"

_"__Shinx? Shinx, shinx, shinx, shinx, shinx!"_ Nova started spinning and running wildly.

"Yeah, that's it Rampardos!" Roark grinned. "Your turn, Dad!"

"You got it, son! Bastiodon, Take Down!" Byron ordered.

"Nova!" I called out a warning.

Nova spun around in time to get a full Take Down attack in the face.

_"__Shiiiiinnxxx!"_

She went flying. Cyndaquill barely managed to jump out of the way in time as she skidded to a stop.

"Nova! Get up, please, get up!" I begged. If Nova was knocked out now I would lose!

Volkner peered at Nova closely. "Nova is unable toâ€" "

"Wait!" I called. Nova's tail twitched. Slowly, she got to her feet. "Nova, can you still battle?" I asked.

_"__Shinxâ€|shinx!"_ Nova called.

Volkner waved his hands. "Nova is still able to battle! The battle continues."

"Hmmpf! Your Shinx is stronger than I expected." Byron remarked. "All that training yesterday must've done you some good. Too bad it's not enough! Your turn, son!"

"Gotcha, Dad!" Roark readied himself. "Rampardos, finish off Shinx, Flamethrower!"

"__Ramparr!"_ Flames gathered in its mouth and then powered strait for Nova.

"__Nova!"_ I yelled. No! If Nova got hit with one more attack it would be all over! What to do, what to do?

Time seemed to slow as the Flamethrower came in waves closer and closer to Nova. Skit gasped and turned her face away. My mind raced frantically to find a solution to this problem. I remembered a day several years back, when my Dad had given me some key advice.

We were watching a televised battle between Sinnoh's Champion, Cynthia, and a challenger. The challenger was incredibly strong. It was the last leg of the battle; both parties were down to one pokemon. It seemed like the challenger might win! When I pointed this out to Dad, he shook his head.

"No, he's not going to win."

"But he's beating Cynthia! See?" I pointed to the TV. The challenger's Weavile had just launched a powerful Blizzard attack and Cynthia's Garchomp was badly damaged.

"He's relying on type-weakness to win." Dad pointed out. "And that's not a bad thing, but you also have to play to your own pokemon's strengths. Weavile's Special Attack isn't as high as its Attack, it would've been better if Weavile had used a Physical attack. And see that?" Dad pointed to the TV. Garchomp had just blasted a powerful Dragon Rush attack which Weavile had blocked by crossing its forearms. "Weavile's speed is incredible. Instead of taking that attack head-on, it should've dodged. Do you see?"

I pouted. "I still think he's gonna win!"

Dad sighed. "Garchomp's attack is really high. Watch how Cynthia uses that to win the battle."

"__Garchomp, Giga Impact!"_ Cynthia yelled from the TV.

"__Garrrr!"_

My Dad had been right. That one, powerful attack had ended the battle, even though the challenger seemed to be winning. I had to use my pokemon's strengths to my advantage! But how?

In my mind's eye I saw Bastiodon step in front of Rampardos to take that attack. It gave me an idea.

"Cyndaquill! Protect Nova!"

"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill dived in front of Nova and took the full

force of the Flamethrower.

"Smart," Roark smiled, "fire moves aren't as effective against fire-type pokemon. But let's see how long Cyndaquill can hold off! Rampardos, pump it up!"

_"__Cynda!"_

"Stay strong Cyndaquill!" I yelled. So far Cyndaquill was shielding Nova from the blast but how long could Cyndaquill keep it up? Then I saw something incredible happen. The flames on Cyndaquill's back were growing _bigger!_

"Huh?" Roark looked puzzled. Then he said frantically, "Rampardos, stop!"

"Too late!" I grinned. "Cyndaquill, use Ember!"

_"__CyndaaaaQuilll!"_

Whooosh!

"Rampardos, dodge!"

Rampardos leaped, leaving Bastiodon to take the full force of Cyndaquill's fiery attack.

"Yeah!" I pumped my fist. "Let's finish this, guys! Nova, use Spark on Rampardos, Cyndaquill, Ember on Bastiodon!"

_"__Shinx!"_

_ "__Cynda!"_

"Bastiodon, counter with Iron Head!"

"Rampardos, dodge!"

_"__Bastio!"_

"Cyndaquill, slip under Bastiodon and use Ember from behind! Novaâ€" "

_"__Ramparâ€"dosâ€"|_" Rampardos primed to jump, but then sparks arched across its body and it couldn't move! Rampardos was paralyzed!

"Get 'em!" I finished.

_"__Shinx!"_

_ "__Cynda!"_

"Rampardos!" Roark yelled as Nova hit it square-on.

"Bastiodon!" Cyndaquill's attack had hit too.

"C'mon, guys! Keep using those attacks!" I ordered.

"Rampardos, Head Smash!" Roark ordered.

"Bastiodon, Iron Head! Show that punk what you're made of!" Byron roared.

"Use your small size to dodge!" I yelled to Cyndaquill and my Shinx.

_"__Cynda, cynda, cynda!"_ Cyndaquill dipped and dodged under and around Bastiodon, then let out a powerful Ember attack when its back was turned.

_"__Shinx, shinx, shinx!"_ Nova was doing the same with Rampardos. She would run under its legs the second it tried to use Head Smash on it, then barrage Rampardos with several Spark attacks from the back.

"You can do it, JT! Whoooo!" Skit screamed.

_"__MROW! MEOW!"_

It wasn't long before Rampardos and Bastiodon started to slow down.

"GRRRR, I WON'T LET YOU DO THIS TO ME! BASTIODON, IRON HEAD!" Byron thundered. Bastiodon launched into a powerful Iron Head attack.

_ "___BASTIODON!"_

"I agree!" Yelled Roark. "Rampardos, Head Smash one last time!"

_"__RAMPARRR!"_

I grinned. "Cyndaquill, Smokescreen!" The field turned black as night.

WHOMP! CRASH!

The smoke cleared, and there, lying in a heap in the middle of the floor, lay Bastiodon and Rampardos.

"Bastiodon and Rampardos are unable to battle! The winner is JT with Cyndaquill and Nova!"

"WHOOOO! YEAH! GO JT!" Skit screamed and rushed down the bleachers.

I stood, slightly stunned. I had defeated Roark and Byron in a double battle. I had won!

"Return, Bastiodon. Nice job, have a long rest now."

"Return, Rampardos. You did well."

Byron and Roark returned their pokemon and walked across the field.

"Congratulations, JT!" Roark exclaimed. "You fought hard and didn't give up even when you were at a disadvantage. You truly deserve

this," Roark reached his hand out and dropped something in my outstretched palm. I held the badge up to the light.

"The Coal Badge." Roark smiled.

I opened my mouth to say thank you when a slap on the back nearly knocked me off my feet.

"Congratulations, boy!" Byron thundered. "Way to use your head, turning Roark and me against each other like that! Guess all that training paid off, huh? Take this as a remembrance of our battle." Byron slapped a badge into my hand and winked. "Keep up the good work."

Bursting with joy, I turned to Cyndaquill and Nova. "Guess what?" I held up both my badges. "We just won the Coal _and_ the Mine Badge!"

4. Chapter 4-Sucker

Chapter 4

Sucker

"JT?"

"I know."

"Uh, JT?"

"I know!"

"Butâ€" "

"I KNOW!" I yelled at Skit who _wouldn't_ stop pestering me!_

"I was just trying to help," Skit grumbled.

I sighed. "I know, I'm sorry. I'm just a bit grumpy."

"Wow, I couldn't tell," She remarked under her breath. I ignored it.

'A bit' grumpy was undercutting it. I was in an absolutely foul mood. _First_ the tunnel between Oreburgh and Hearthome City collapsed so we had to go _all_ the way _up_ to Eterna City in order to find a path to Hearthome and now _this!_

"Maybe you should tell it to go away again," Volkner suggested.

"Fine," I spun on my heel and faced the Zubat which had been following me ever since Cyndaquill had saved it from the falling rocks. Of course, I hadn't noticed it until we had left the cityscape of Oreburgh and were on an open road. "For the sixth timeâ€" "

"Fifth."

"Go back to Oreburgh!" I yelled.

"The Zubat drooped and flew back the way we had come but had hardly gone ten feet before turning around to follow us at a distance. Just like the other six times I had ordered it to go home.

"You know, JT," Volkner began, "why don't you just catch it? It wouldn't be fluttering in your ear that way, at least."

"Yeah, JT!" Skit said enthusiastically. "You only have two pokemon, you need another. Think what Chris and Danica would say next time you see them."

"Cynda!"

"Mrrp!"

"Oh!" I rubbed the back of my neck in embarrassment. "I, uh, hadn't thought of that. Hey," I turned around. "Zubat, come back!"

"Zu? Zubat, zu!" Zubat flew to meet me.

"Want to be a part of my team?" I asked it.

"Zubat!"

"Well, then," I took a pokeball out of my vest pocket, "pokeball, go!"

I tapped Zubat on the head with my pokeball and it disappeared inside.

"Well, I guess that's one way to catch a pokemon!" Volkner remarked.

"Are you going to name it?" Asked Skit.

"Ummm! actually, yes! I will name it!" And I already had the perfect name in mind. "Go, Sucker!" I threw the pokeball.

"Zubat!" Joyfully Zubat began flitting around me.

"Um, wait, you named it Sucker?" Exclaimed Skit incredulously.

"Like, Sucker as in lollipop or Sucker as in loser?" Volkner questioned.

"What? No! Sucker as in, you know, Leech Life!" I protested, but they were already laughing too hard to hear me.

"Go, Sucker!" Skit giggled.

"Use Leech Life, Sucker!"

"Sucker!"

"Hey, not funny! Quit it! Guys!"

Oh, boy, this was going to be a long walk.

* * *

><p>After hours of walking we topped a hill andâ€" <p>

"Look!" I exclaimed. "There it is!"

"Whoa, it's just like Jubilife!"

"Uh, wait a sec, this isn't right." Volkner gazed at the map and turned it this way and that. Skit and I ignored him.

"Hey, let's race!" Skit suggested.

"Yeah! Threeâ€" "

"Something's wrong. Eterna should've been much further away!"

"Twoâ€" "

"Uh-oh, guys?"

"One! Go!"

I took off like a rocket, wind rushing through my hair, feet pounding on the road. Skit was right next to me, pushing ahead. I put on a sudden burst of speed.

"Guys, waâ€" " The rest of Volkner's words were lost on me, I couldn't hear anything over the rushing blood pounding through my veins.

Skit and I were neck in neck, Eterna was looming closer and closer. It was farther than I had first thought.

"To that hotdog stand!" Skit yelled.

"Beat you!" I yelled back and increased my pace. Thenâ€" we were in Eterna. People! Dodge left, right; the hotdog stand which I had seen so clearly from my vantage point on the hill was now lost in the crowds. A break in the swarmâ€" the yellow and red of an umbrella poked above all the heads. I headed towards it.

"Look out! Whoa!" I barely managed to break in time to avoid barreling headlong into the fat lady who was carrying the yellow and red umbrella.

"Watch it!" She snapped.

"Geez," I said once she had disappeared into the crowds. "What kind of lady carries an umbrella on a perfectly sunny day just to shade her Snubbull?"

I swept my gaze over the heads of the crowd and finally spotted the _correct_ red-and-yellow umbrella.

"There!" I said to myself and ran towards it, stepping on several people's toes on the way.

"Ow!"

"Hey!"

"Yikes!"

"Sorry, sorry, sorry," I elbowed my way through the crowd and finally got to the hotdog stand.

"You're late!" Skit grinned.

"Aw, man!"

"There you are!" Volkner appeared out of the crowd, looking a little worse for wear. Cyndaquill and Silk were by his feet and Sucker hovered by his head. "Guys, weâ€"

"JT?"

I heard a familiar voice and turned around.

"What are you doing back here?" Danica asked. Her arms were full of packages and bags from her shopping spree.

"Danica!" I exclaimed. "Are you going through the tunnel too?"

"Huh? What tunnel?" She asked, puzzled.

"Umâ€" Volkner began.

"Huh," Skit mused to herself. "This looks kinda familiar."

"You know; the Route 11 tunnel through to Celestic Town." I continued, ignoring them. It would make sense to see Danica here if she heard of the tunnel collapse down by Oreburgh.

"Uhâ€" Volkner started.

"What are you talking about?" Danica asked. "Route 11 is way up by Eterna City."

"Huh?" Now I was confused. "But we're _in_ Eterna."

"Actuallyâ€" "

Danica interrupted him, "No, we're in Jubilife."

"WHAT?!" I hollered, spinning to face Volkner. "But I thought you said the shortest way to Eterna was on Route 6?! What are we doing in back in Jubilife?!"

"I was _trying_ to tell you when you and Skit took off running!" Volkner exclaimed. "I was holding the map on its side and got my directions mixed up."

"No wonder I recognized this place!" Skit exclaimed.

"Awwâ€| Now we gotta go back to Oreburgh. This is the _worst day ever!_"

"Don't forget that you captured Zubat." Volkner tried to cheer me up. It didn't work.

"Whatever," I mumbled. "Let's just get started." I began to drag my feet back up the way we came.

"Actually," Danica said as she shifted a few of her packages around to make standing more comfortable, "it's about the same distance if you go through Oreburgh or if you go up Route 204 through Floaroma Town, and at least you haven't gone that way yet."

"Butâ€" "

"Ooohhh! Please, JT?" Skit started hopping up and down on her toes. "Please can we go that way? I want to see as much of Sinnoh as possible while I'm here!"

"Wellâ€|" I debated.

"C'mon JT, it'll be fun!" Volkner urged.

Skit's excitement caught on and I brightened towards the subject. Maybe it wasn't such a bad thing after all that Volkner had held the map upside-down. "Sure!"

"Oh!" Danica snapped her fingers. "I almost forgot! Professor Rowan called and said Professor Elm wanted to talk to you, JT. You're supposed to call him as soon as you can."

I looked at Skit and Volkner and shrugged. "Do you guys mind if we wait until after I call Professor Elm to head towards Floaroma?"

Volkner smiled. "Go ahead, JT. We won't leave without you."

"I think we could all use a break," Skit suggested. "We've been walking almost all day."

_ "__Cyndaquill!"_

_ "__Zubat!"_

_ "__Mroww!"_

Soon we were all gathered round the phone at the same Pokemon Center where our first adventures had taken place. Sucker was perched on my shoulder and Cyndaquill was in Skit's arms as I tapped my foot impatiently, waiting for Professor Elm to pick up.

Finally: "Hello?" Professor Elm's face showed up on the screen. "Ah, JT!" He broke into a smile, then he noticed Skit standing next to me. "Oh, hi! Skit, isn't it?" Skit nodded. "Yes, I'm afraid your brother is out doing field work, otherwise I'd call him to come and say hi."

"That's fine," Skit said.

"Actually," I interrupted, "I called because Danica said Professor

Rowan said you were looking for me."

"Oh, yeah." Professor Elm seemed remember. "I called almost every Pokemon Center in Sinnoh looking for you! Professor Rowan finally had the bright idea to call your two friends, Chris and Danica I believe? and ask them to tell you to call me as soon as possible."

"Yes, I got the message," I shifted my weight from one foot to the other.

"Yes, yes, of course you did, otherwise you wouldn't be calling." Professor Elm said. "I was calling you because"oh! Hey Cyndaquill!"

_"__Cynda!"_

"How are you doing? Is JT feeding you enough?"

"Yes," I interrupted. "Cyndaquill ate its own lunch and half of mine, today. You were saying?"

"Ah, yes," Professor Elm pushed his glasses up and leaned slightly forward. "Have you been using you Pokedex?"

"Uhhhhhhh" | "

Professor Elm nodded his head. "I thought so. I was very confused when I was getting no signals from you Pokedex so I thought to call you. I gave that Pokedex to you for a reason, JT. I was hoping you would use it and help me with my research. Do you still want it, and the responsibility that comes with it, JT?"

"Uh, yes please," I nodded my head, face red. "That is, if you'll let me keep it."

"Good," Professor Elm nodded again. "And I expect you to actually use it, this time. Now, so I know you know how to use it; let me watch you register your pokemon in it."

"Uh, sure," I took the Pokedex out of the vest pocket which I had last stuck it in.

"Now flip it open and point it at the pokemon you want to register."

I did as he said and pointed it at Sucker.

_"__Zubat, the Bat Pokemon. It checks its surroundings and location using reflections of the ultrasonic waves from its mouth."_

There was a soft beep from Professor Elm's side as the information arrived to his computer successfully.

"Weight: 16.2 pounds, height: 2' 3 inches, moves: Leech Life, Supersonic, Astonish," Professor Elm bobbed his head. "Good. A little on the small side, but quite healthy. Try your other pokemon."

_"__Cyndaquill, the Fire Mouse Pokemon. Though normally calm and laid-back, when angered, the flames on its back will flare up._

_ "__Delcatty, the Prim Pokemon. This pokemon dislikes arguing and would rather move to another spot than fight when disturbed._

_ "__Shinx" (I had let Nova out of her pokeball for this) "the Flash Pokemon. The extension and contraction of its muscles generates electricity. It glow when in trouble."_

"Awesome!" I exclaimed. "I can't believe I didn't use this before! It would've been so helpful!"

"Exactly," Professor Elm said. "I see Cyndaquill learned Ember."

"Oh, yeah," I nodded. "It took a whole bunch of training but we finally pulled it off," I glanced at Cyndaquill. "Didn't we, Cyndaquill?"

_ "__Cynda!"_

Professor Elm smiled. "I knew you could get Cyndaquill to open up. Thank you so much for taking it! Speaking of which"

I grinned.

"I wanted to talk to you about that bike I gave you."

My grin faded and my red face grew white. "Bike?"

"Yes, you know that one I said you could have when I had forgotten to take it on the ship?"

I swallowed. I saw the bike scorched by Thunder Shocks and flattened by construction equipment. "What-what about it?"

"Well, I just wanted to tell you"

I closed my eyes and prayed he wouldn't ask for it back.

"That I got a new one!"

I opened my eyes in relief. Skit giggled.

Professor Elm reached to the side and a brand-new, shining bike appeared on-screen.

"See? Isn't it a beauty?" He started talking really fast. "It's a brand new, state of the art Acro 1000 with improved seat cushioning for strained backs, five different gear settings for optimum performance capability, imported rubber handles for increased grip ability, sleek and aerodynamic body design made of quality light-weight steel for top speed, 24 inch wheels with non-slick ultra-grip tires"and it even has a bell!"

Ding, ding!

"I always wanted one of those," Professor Elm looked fondly at the bell and bike. "Well, use that Pokedex as often as you can! Bye!"

The screen went black.

Skit and I blinked, stupefied.

"What-what did he just say?" Skit asked.

"Uh, I have no earthly idea." I turned to Volkner. He was practically drooling and staring at the blank screen.

"Acro 1000 with non-slick ultra-grip tires, sleek and aerodynamic body design, imported rubber handles, five different gear settings, and improved seat cushioning for strained backs?"

"You forgot the bell." Skit oh-so helpfully added.

"I want one of those!" Volkner exclaimed. Skit looked at me and rolled her eyes.

"C'mon big boy." She dragged Volkner away by the collar of his shirt. "Mommy can buy you one of those for Christmas, but until then it's no use drooling over a bike."

I smothered a laugh as we walked back into the lounge area. Danica was reclining on a couch, feet propped up, packages piled in a heap next to her and flipping through a magazine. She looked up and set the magazine down when we walked in.

"So?" She questioned. "What did he want?"

"He wanted me to use my Pokedex more." I explained. Danica deflated a little.

"Oh, so no new, exciting, world-shaking discoveries?"

I shook my head, smothering a grin. Danica: always coming up with the craziest ideas about things.

"Well," She sat up straighter and brightened. "At least we can have our battle now!"

"Wait, what?!"

Skit giggled.

"You heard me, a battle." Danica frowned. "In less you don't want to?"

"Umm, wellâ€"why don't we battle once we get to Floaroma Town?"

"Are you kidding?" Danica crossed her arms. "Macy's is having a sale on shoes tomorrow and everything in Sears is 25% off this weekend!"

Skit stopped giggling and frowned. "Wait, I thought Sears was that appliance store?"

Danica continued, "There's plenty of time for me to get to the Tradeathon after I hit all the good sales. So, do you want to battle now, or not? Chances are we won't run into each other until the Tradeathon. This might be our only chance to battle before

then."

"Uh, well, I guess Sucker could use the training."

"Wait; is that what you named your Zubat?" Danica giggled. "Is it Sucker as in the lollipop, or Sucker as in loser?"

"Hey," I crossed my arms, "Not funny." She just laughed all the harder. I turned to Zubat. "Don't worry, she doesn't mean it."

_"__Zuuâ€¦!"_

"Is that ok with you?" I asked Volkner and Skit.

"Wellâ€¦!" Volkner scratched his head. "We may have to camp out during the night, but if you guys don't mind, I'm game."

"I think that sounds fun!" Skit exclaimed.

"Alright, then," I turned to Danica, "I accept!"

"The battle between Danica and JT is about to begin!" Volkner, our ever-present referee, declared. "Each trainer will use two pokemon, no substitutions! The first trainer to defeat both of the opponent's pokemon wins! Ready, begin!"

"Cyndaquill, go!"

_"__Cynda!"_

"Pinky, make your entrance!"

_"__Shellos!"_

"Hmmm, a Shellos," I murmured and outdrew my Pokedex.

_"__Shellos, the Sea Slug Pokemon. Beware of pushing strongly on its squishy body, as it makes a mysterious purple fluid ooze out."_

"Sea Slug pokemon, hmmmâ€¦ let's see if we can dry it out. Cyndaquill, Ember!"

_"__Cyndaâ€¦!"_

"Not so fast!" Danica yelled. "Girls get first move!"

"Hey!" I hollered, taken aback.

"Pinky, Mud-slap!"

_"__Shellâ€¦os, os, os!"_

_"__Cyndaquill!"_

"Ahh! Cyndaquill!" I yelled. Cyndaquill stumbled around, mud in its eyes. "Cyndaquill, use Ember!"

_"__Quill!"_ Cyndaquill let off a wild Ember attack which missed Pinky by a mile.

"Ha! You'll have to do better than that to beat me!" Danica exclaimed.

"JT!" Skit yelled from the sidelines. "Shellos is a water-type pokemon! Ember won't do much damage!"

"It won't?" I asked, momentarily confused. Danica used that.

"Pinky, Water Pulse!"

_"__Shell-Os!"_

"Cyndaquill, dodge!"

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill jumpedâ€"right into the oncoming attack.

"Whoo! Nice shot, Pinky! Now, use Water Pulse again!"

"Grrrâ€" I gritted my teeth. This battle wasn't going so well so far. I had to do something, quick. "Cyndaquill, Smokescreen!"

_"__Cynda!"_

Thick, black smoke billowed across the field, evening the odds. Cyndaquill was blind, but now so was Shellos.

"Hmph, just when I was winning too. Oh well, if we can't attack, we'll just defend!" Danica made a sweeping motion with her arm. "Pinky, use Harden!"

"Cyndaquill, Tackle!"

_"__Shell!"_

_ " __Quill!"_

Just then a strong wind blew Cyndaquill's Smokescreen away, just in time for me to witness Cyndaquill's Tackle attack hitting Pinky squarely. Pinky stumbled back, hurt, but not bad.

"Grrrâ€" I forgot! Harden raises defense, Tackle won't do that good!"

"Ha! You might as well give up now!" Danica pointed at the spot where Shellos and Cyndaquill were. "Pinky, Water Pulse!"

Before Cyndaquill could respond, the blast of water sent it flying!

_"__Quiiiiilll!"_

"Ooh," Skit winced, "From close-range. That did a lot of damage."

"Cyndaquill! Can you get up?" I asked.

_"__Cynda, cynda, cynda."_ Cyndaquill started walking around in

circles.

"Huh? Cyndaquill, what's wrong with you?
Tackle!"

__"__Cyndaaaaa"Qu"__ Cyndaquill ran at Pinky but wound up doing a nose-dive into the ground.

"Cyndaquill?" I asked again.

"Water Pulse can confuse its targets!" Danica yelled out. "Pinky, finish it with Mud-slap!"

__"__Shellos!"__

__"__Cynda"|"__ The attack sent Cyndaquill sprawling. It didn't get up.

"Cyndaquill is unable to battle! Shell"I mean
Pinky!"wins!"

"Yes! Awesome, Pinky!"

"Cyndaquill!" I rushed onto the field and scooped it up in my arms.
"Nice try, buddy. You deserve a long rest." I threw my pokeball.
"Sucker, go! This is your first battle! Let's see what you're made of!"

__"__Zuuu!"__

"Zubat, huh? Well, then, we'll just confuse it too! Pinky, Water Pulse!"

"Dodge!" I ordered.

__"__Zu!"__ Zubat buoyed over the attack. Danica gritted her teeth.

"Ha! Take that!" I grinned. "Sucker"I called up the moves Professor Elm had mentioned and picked one.
"Astonish!"

__"__Zubat!"__ With amazing speed, Zubat dashed in and struck Shellos. Pinky flinched.

"Awesome, Sucker!" I declared. Skit giggled from the sidelines. "Use Supersonic!"

__"__Screeee-eee-eee-eee!"__

"Ah! Pinky!" Danica gasped. "Use Mud-slap!"

__"__Shell? Shell? Os"__ Pinky tripped over a nonexistent rock instead.

"Pinky!"

"Alright!" I pumped my fist. "Sucker, Leech Life!"

__"__Zu!"__ Sucker closed in for the attack.

"No! Pinky, quick, use Harden!"

_"__Shell!_" Confused though it was, Shellos heard Danica and obeyed. It grew all metallic.

_"__Zubat!"_ Sucker attempted to bite it but instead hurt itself on Pinky's now-hard soft body. _"Zu!"_

"Sucker!" I exclaimed. "Well, just try Astonish again!"

"Pinky, hit it with Water Pulse!"

_"__Shell!"_ Pinky looked up and launched its attack from gaping mouth.

"Sucker!" No! It was too close to dodge! The attack was going to hit!

_"__Zu!"_ Then, just like last time, Zubat rode over the attack. How on earth? It dove and struck Shellos hard.

"Oooh! Pinky!" Danica squealed. "Quick, use Mud-slap!"

"?Shell?" Once again Pinky tripped over its own feet"even though it was a slug and didn't have feet.

"Sucker, finish it with Leech Life!" I ordered.

"Nooo! Pinky!"

Zubat struck.

_"__Shelllll!"_

"Pinky is unable to battle! Sucker wins!"

"Yes! Awesome, Sucker!" I jumped up and down. "I'm so glad you're on my team now!"

"Return, Pinky," Danica said, downcast. "You did well, take a long rest." She looked up and glared at me. "I'm going to get you for hurting my Pinky! Twiggy! Make your entrance!"

_"__Tur-Twig!"_

"Now, Tackle! Pay back Sucker for what it did to Pinky!"

"Sucker, dodge and use Leech Life!"

_"__Zu!"_

"Twiggy, Withdraw!" Turtwig disappeared into its shell. Sucker's attack bounced harmlessly off it.

"Hey, you gonna hide in your shell all day?" I asked.

"No!" Danica shot back. "I was just waiting for the right time to do this! Twiggy, Razor Leaf!"

_"__Tur!"_

"Sucker, just like you did with Water Pulse! Dodge!"

_"__Zuâ€bat!"_ Sucker flew up butâ€the attack still hit!

"Huh?" What on earth was going on?!

"Ha! Square hit! Twiggy, now use Absorb!"

_"__Turtwig!"_ Tendrils shot out from Turtwig's shell, enveloping Sucker.

_"__Zuuubbaaatt!"_ Sucker's energy was drained away.

"You gotta get outta there!" I yelled. "C'mon, use Supersonic!"

_"__Zuâ€|"_ Zubat glanced up.

"Twiggy, dodge!"

Screee-eee-eee-eee!

_"__Turtwig!"_ Turtwig leapt out of the way, requiring it to drop Zubat. Sucker landed with a _thump_ on the ground.

"Use Astonish!" I ordered.

Sucker dashed up from the ground and struck Twiggy. Turtwig didn't stand a chance.

_"__Turrr!"_

"Aaahh! Twiggy! No! Not you too! Get up! Oh, please, get up!"

_"__Tur-twigâ€|"_ Twiggy pushed itself up onto its feet.

"Finish it up with Astonish!" I ordered.

"Twiggy! Counter with Tackle!"

_"__Turtwig!"_

Turtwig launched itself at Zubat. The two pokemon met head on. Too bad Turtwig has a thicker head.

"Sucker!" I yelled as it went tumbling off into the dirt. "Quick, get up!"

"Nuh-uh-uh!" Danica hollered. "Twiggy, Razor Leaf!"

_"__Turâ€Twig!"_

"Sucker, dodge!"

My Zubat lifted its head upâ€just in time to meet the Razor

Leaf.

_"__Zuuuuuu!"_

"Sucker! Are you all right? Can you get up?" I asked, frantically.

_"__Zu-zu-zubatâ€|"_" It tried to push itself up onto its wingsâ€"but collapsed.

"Sucker is unable to battle! The winner is Twiggy! That meansâ€"Danica won the match!"

"Yaaaay!" Danica squealed and ran towards Twiggy. "We won! We won! We won!" She sang and danced in circles.

Meanwhile, I knelt by Sucker's side and scooped it gently into my arms.

_"__Zuâ€|?"_

I smiled sadly. "It's okay; it was your first battle. I couldn't have expected you to do any better. Take a long rest."

Dyoo

Sucker disappeared inside its pokeball.

I stayed on my knees, shaking my head. "I-I lost. After defeating Roark and Byron in a double battle, I lost against _Danica_."

"Hey, JT!" Danica ran up to me. "That was an awesome battle! Thanks so much for battling with me!"

"But I-I lost."

"Don't worry, JT," Volkner came up and slapped me on the back. "Everyone loses sometime. Even Gym Leaders lose! How else would people get Gym Badges?"

"And you battled hard, JT," Skit joined in.

"Yeah," Danica said. "I thought I was about to lose a couple times!"

"Really?" I asked.

"Mmm-Hmm." She nodded. "And I thinkâ€"ooooo!" She broke off with a squeal. "Ten percent off hair accessories at Claire's! Gotta go! Bye! Keep up the good work!" Danica yelled as she ran off.

"Well, that was abrupt." Volkner remarked, looking into the distance where Danica had disappeared. He turned to us, "Ready to go to Floaroma?"

"Yeah!"

"Let's go!"

_"__Mrrrp!"_

5. Chapter 5-Tripping Over Legends!

Chapter 5

Tripping Over Legends!

It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining, a soft breeze was blowing, the sky was cloudless, and the Starly were singing. Cyndaquill and Silk were bounding through the flower fields, causing sprays of pollen to puff up wherever they landed.

"Ahhâ€¦" Skit took a deep breath. "Isn't this just beautiful?"

It was late morning. Volkner had been right about having to spend the night outside last night, but it was worth it to see Floaroma in the daylight.

"Oooh!" Skit knelt down. "Look at these pretty flowers!"

"They're all pretty." I remarked.

"Well, I think these are the prettiest." She stood up with two pink flowers in her hands. "Silk!"

Silk came bounding up.

_"__Mrrr?"_

"Here," Skit tucked one flower behind Silk's ear and one behind her ear. "Now we match!"

_"__Mrrrp!" _Silk sat down all regal-like.

"Hey? Is that a Pokemon Center I see up ahead?" Volkner asked.

"Yay! We're almost there!" Skit jumped up and down.

"Floaroma town, here we come!" I said. "Soon we'll beâ€¦"Whoa-o!" I tripped and fell into the grass. "Ouch."

"JT, are you all right?" Skit asked, puzzled.

"Yeah, I thinkâ€¦"

_"__Watch it, buster! I'm not a foot-stool!"_

"Whaaa!" I leapt up in surprise. "Did-did that pokemon just talk?" I said, pointing at the little green hedgehog that was glaring at me.

_"__You bet I can talk! What are you, deaf? You need to pay more attention to where your putting you feet!"_

"Shaymin, now, now; be nice!" A giant pink flower stood up.

"Yaaaahhh!" I jumped again. "Another talking pokemon?!"

"I think that's just a regular person, JT." Skit remarked.

"Oh," Well, she had been wearing a big, pink hat and crouching on the ground! What was I to expect?

"I'm sorry about my Shaymin," The girl explained. "Sometimes it's a bitâ€"rude."

_"__Hey! I think I deserve a bit of gratitude for not busting his nose!"_

"Shaymin, huh?" I took out my Pokedex.

_"__Shaymin, the Gratitude Pokemon. The flowers all over its body burst into bloom if it is lovingly hugged and senses gratitude."_

"Gratitude pokemon?" Skit snickered. Shaymin glared at her.

"Oh! You're a pokemon trainer?" The girl questioned, seeing my Pokedex.

"Yeah," I replied, folding up my Pokedex and sticking it back in my pocket. "And this is my partner, Cyndaquill."

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill stuck its nose above the grass, then sneezed.

"We're on our way to Hearthome for the Tradeathon." I explained.

"Really? Well, I'm sorry if I caused you any trouble." She held out her hand. "I'm Lily, by the way."

"JT," I shook her hand. "And these are my friends, Skit and Volkner."

"Nice to meet you," Skit said, shaking Lily's hand.

"Yes," Volkner said. "A pleasure to meet you. May I ask what you're doing out here?"

"Why, picking flowers, of course!" Lily held up a basket full of pretty flowers with her dirt-covered hand.

_"__Well, actually we'reâ€"_"_

"You see," Lily interrupted Shaymin, who huffed and turned away, "I work at the Pick a Peck of Colors Flower Shop in Floaroma, and we ran out of the red flowers, so I went to get some more."

"But-those are all pink flowers," Skit asked, confused.

"Huh?" Lily blinked. "Oh, yeah, you see, pink's my favorite color, and I just couldn't resist picking some of themâ€""

"Hey, I know!" Volkner snapped his fingers. "How about we help you pick red flowers!"

"Yeah, that's a great idea, Volkner!" I exclaimed.

"Really?" Lily blinked. "You would do that for me?"

"Of course!" Skit exclaimed, "It would be fun! Wouldn't it, Silk?"

_"__Mrrow!"_

"Do you want a certain kind of flower?" Volkner asked.

"Uh, no. Just any flower that's red will do!"

"Great!" I said. "Let's get started! Sucker, Nova, come on out!"

_"__Zuuu!"_

_ " __Shinx!"_

"Great idea!" Volkner exclaimed. "Magnemite, Jolteon, c'mon out!"

_"__Magne."_

_ " __Jolt!"_

"Oh, wait! I almost forgot!" We all paused and turned to Lily. "The stems have to be seven to ten inches, and you can only pick one out of every three flowers, that way they'll grow back!"

"Got it!" I said. "C'mon everybody, let's go!"

For the next hour or so, we picked flowers. And you know what? It was fun! Picking flowers is in no way a girly thing to do. There was this one kind of flower, a bell-shaped one that could be either red or orange, and you had to be really strong to break the stem—or have a Shinx with sharp claws. Also, you got dirty. This one time, I crawled under a bush to get this really pretty red flower.

"Ready, Nova?" I asked.

_"__Shinx!"_

With one neatly-manicured claw, Nova sliced the stem of the flower quite neatly.

"Awesome, Nova. For once, I'm glad you spend so much time sharpening your claws."

_"__Shinx!"_ Nova smiled at me.

When I crawled out of that bush, I was covered with dirt and all these tiny seeds and leaves!

Skit laughed when she saw me. "If Lily was a giant flower, than you're a giant bush!"

At first I frowned, but that didn't last long because—I have to admit—it was funny.

_"__Shinx! Shinx, shinx!"_ Nova licked stubbornly at the seeds in her fur.

"So," I asked Lily, when we found ourselves working side-by-side in a big patch of red flowers. "Isn't Floaroma kind of a weird name for a town? I understand Oreburch City, with the mine near and all; and I understand Snowpoint, being stuck in the snow all the timeâ€¦" I trailed off.

"Oh, that's easy." Lily smiled, tugging on a particularly stubborn flower. "It's the combination of the words 'flower' and 'aroma', because of all the flowers around here. Floaroma."

"Oh! That makes since now!" I exclaimed.

_"__Imbecile. A Wobbuffet could've told you that!"_ Lily glared at Shaymin. I ignored it. I've had a lot of practice with Skit.

"Ah, there," Lily got the stubborn flower. "I think we're good now." She looked back at the large piles of flowers we had gathered.

"Time to bring these back to the shop! Look how many flowers we got!"

We walked to where Skit and Volkner had been taking a short break.

"Are we done?" Skit asked.

"Ow, my back!" Volkner mumbled. "I think I must've thrown it out picking all those flowers!"

Lily giggled. Straightening, she said, "Now, you have to carry the flowers gently, that way you don't damage their petals. Like this," She picked up a large bouquet of reds, letting them just rest in her arms.

"Like this?" Volkner asked.

"Exactly!"

I picked up my own bouquet, hoping the pollen wouldn't make me sneeze. I was making sure to be very careful, not letting even one flower fall to the ground whenâ€¦"

_"__Gently!"_ Shaymin snapped from near my foot.

"Waaahh!" I jumped, dropping all the flowers. Skit and Volkner laughed.

"Shaymin!" Lily admonished.

_"__What? I was just cautioning him to be very gentle."_ Shaymin innocently scratched her ear.

Lily frowned.

"Come on, let's go." Volkner started walking. "The sooner we turn in these flowers, the sooner we can eat lunch!"

"Oooh! And I know the perfect place!" Lily said excitedly. "Floaroma Meadow!"

"Floaroma Meadow?" Skit frowned, questioningly.

"Yep!" Lily bobbed her head.

"__There are even more flowers than there are here!" _Shaymin declared.

"Neat!" Said Skit, with a large smile. "I'm all for it!"

"Sounds good!" I said. "Cyndaquill?"

"__Cyndaâ€"Quill! Quill, quill."_

"__Cyndaquill says it sounds funâ€"as long as there are no more of those yellow-puff flowers! Those make it sneeze!"_

"Wow, that's so neat you have a pokemon that can talk!" I said to Lily.

"Yeah," Skit agreed. "How does it do that? I never see its mouth move."

"It doesn't actually talk," Lily explained. "It uses telepathy to speak."

"__Zu?"_

"Telepathy?" I echoed Sucker's thoughts.

"Communicating between minds," Volkner clarified. "Shaymin is speaking right into our minds."

"That's so neat!" Skit squealed.

"No kidding!" I said. "That must be awesome, being able to talk to your pokemon and all!"

"It is," Lily agreed. "Shaymin is my best friend. But sometimesâ€"it can be a bit annoying."

"__Hey! I'm right here, you know!"_

"I couldn't see how," Skit said dryly.

"Ah, here we are," Lily stopped in front of a building. "Madam Valencia runs the shop. She's a really nice boss."

She pushed the door open and a bell jingled.

"Oh, wow." Skit breathed in deep.

The aroma was amazing; sweet, but not too sweet, with a touch ofâ€"I have no idea.

There was a woman behind the counter, about my mom's age. She looked up in surprise.

"Lily? What are you doing here? I gave you the day off."

"Oh, uhâ€¦" Lily glanced at us. "I remembered that we were running out of red flowers so I went to pick some. I didn't mind, really. And these kind people offered to help me. Uh, Madam Valencia, this is Volkner, JT, Skit, and their pokemon."

Madam Valencia nodded a greeting. "Nice to meet you. I'm afraid my new employee just loves her job so much she doesn't know what to do on her off days but work!"

Lily blushed.

"Uh, Madam Valencia, where would you like us to set the flowers?" Volkner asked.

"Oh, right there is fine, on the floor. Now Lily, go enjoy the rest of the day with your friends! I don't want to see you in here again unless it's as a customer!"

"Yes ma'am." Lily bowed, face burning. "Ready for the picnic?" She asked us.

"Mmm-hmmm! Am I!" I declared.

* * *

><p>"Oh, wow! That was delicious!" I sat back and enjoyed the remnants of my meal in my stomach.<p>

"I didn't know you were such a good cook, Skit!" Lily said, polishing off the last of her food.

"Thanks," Skit grinned. "I've had lots of practice."

"Did you guys enjoy it?" I asked the pokemon.

_ "__Cynda!"_

_ "__Shinx!"_

_ "__Magne!"_

_ "__Mrrp!"_

_ "__Zubat!"_

_ "__Jolt!"_

_ "__Oh, it was yummy!"_

"Shaymin is right," Said Volkner as he gathered up all our trash. "You should cook more often."

Skit blushed. "Thanks."

"Ready, Cyndaquill?" Volkner stepped back from the pile of trash he had created.

"Wait, what are you doing?" Lily looked slightly confused.

"Watch and you'll find out!" I said. "Cyndaquil, Ember!"

"Cyndaquil!"

Whoosh! The trash went up in flames. Soon all that was left was a pile of ash.

Volkner rubbed his hands together. "Well, clean-up's done."

"Wow," Lily exclaimed, "it must be great having a pokemon with Ember. You can do so many things with it!"

"Well," I rubbed the back of my head, abashed. "Cyndaquil only learned Ember recently, but when we figured it could burn our trash, it sure did make things a lot easier."

"Hmmpf! Burning trash and all is pretty cool but it's not as cool as this!" Shaymin strutted forward.

"Now, Shaymin!" Lily started.

_"Watch and learn what _true_ eco-friendly looks like! HUUUUHH!"_ Shaymin took a deep breath drew the smoky air through its back! Shaymin's bright green back and pink flower grew a bit dusky in coloration. _"Huph!"_ Shaymin let out all its air at once—and it was totally clean.

"Ha! Beat that, busters!"

"Umm, what just happened?" I blinked.

"Uhh," Lily laughed. "Shaymin just cleaned the air. It's one of its abilities."

"Whoa, that's so neat!" Skit applauded.

"But, what about you color?" Volkner questioned. "Why did it get darker?"

"Oh, that?" Shaymin gave a little shake. _"That'll wear off in a bit."_

"Well, what do you want to do now?" Lily asked.

Volkner glanced at the sun and sighed. "We should probably get going now."

"Oh," Lily looked disappointed.

"It was nice meeting you," Skit said.

"Yeah, it was really fun picking all those flowers!" Something I thought I would never say. I just hope Danica doesn't find out it otherwise I'd never hear the end of it!

"Well, bye!" Lily stood and waved as we walked away.

Thump.

"Huh?" Pausing, I looked down to see what my foot had hit. "Hey, what's this?" I knelt down and brushed some of the grass away from a plain, rectangular, green plate. Shaymin was there in an instant.

_"__Lily! I've found it!"_

Lily rushed over and knelt where that thing was lying in the grass. "Really? Do you think this is really it?"

"What? What is it?" I asked, trying to see over her shoulder.

"What's going on?" Volkner and Skit gathered around.

_"__Yes! I'm sure it is!"_

"Then you know what this means, right?" Asked Lily.

"What what means?" Skit questioned.

_"__Yes, only one more, and thenâ€"_"_

"What's going on?!" I burst out.

Lily stood up, the green plate in her hands. "Come with me to my room and I'll tell you."

* * *

><p>We walked back to Floaroma and stopped in front of a cute house. Lily pushed open the door.<p>

"Wow, is this yours?" Skit asked.

"No," Lily explained, "I'm just renting a room here. Come on in." She opened another door. The room was a bit on the small side, a basic square, there was a bed against one wall, with a nightstand, and in one of the corners there was a wooden desk. Lily reached into the drawer of the nightstand and pulled out a rather large cloth-rapped bundle.

"You see," Lily said. Kneeling, she began to unwind the bundle, "I didn't tell you the whole truth when I said I was gathering flowers." She folded the cloth up neatly and set it aside. We gathered round to see what she had.

Carefully she laid them out on the floor so we could see. It was plates. Just like the one I had tripped on; they were rectangular and a variety of colors. She set the green one with the others.

"I was looking for the Meadow Plate," She explained. "See, I already have the Flame Plate, Splash Plate, Zap Plate, Icicle Plate, Fist Plate, Toxic Plate, Earth Plate, Sky Plate, Mind Plate, Insect plate, Stone Plate, Spooky Plate, Draco Plate, and Dread Plate. With the Meadow Plate, that makes fifteen. I'm only missing the Iron Plate, and I think I know where that is."

"Plates?" I asked. "What are those? Why are you looking for them?"

"Sit and I'll tell you," Lily patted the floor.

We all sat around the Plates, like we were gathered around a campfire, roasting marshmallows. Silk immediately hopped into Skit's lap and Cyndaquil into mine. I leaned forward in anticipation.

"You see," Lily began, "Shaymin and I aren't from Floaroma."

_"__You got that right!_"_

"For a long time now we've been wandering Sinnoh, searching for Plates. Before me, it was my Grandfather's dream to find all the Plates. When he passed away, it became my dream. I started out with a book and three Plates: the Zap, Stone, and Insect Plate, which were the only ones my Grandfather had succeeded in finding. At first my Father refused to let me go—he thought my Grandfather was crazy for spending so much time searching for those Plates. But I begged and begged and finally he relented. First, I went to Celestic Town, a town rich with pokemon history, and it was there that I found my first Plate, the Draco Plate.

"Sometimes finding Plates was easy: it was as if I was being pulled to them. Other times it was more difficult. I would settle down for a time; weeks, months, get a job, but never stop searching for the Plate. If I didn't find it, I would move on. Sometimes I would spend several months in a town and never find the Plate, but when I passed through that town on my way to somewhere else, the Plate would be almost in plain sight! Sometimes people would have the Plates, using them for decoration or whatnot, not knowing what they possessed. They would happily give me the Plate if I asked. Once, I met an old man who, when younger, also searched for the Plates, but never found more than two. He was so happy that someone else had heard the legend—he pointed me towards Floaroma and suggested that the Meadow Plate could be found here. So I came here, and when I didn't find the Plate within the first week, I rented a room and got a job at Pick a Peck of Colors. It was an added bonus that whenever we needed more flowers, I could go out to Floaroma Meadow and search for the Plate at the same time as I gathered flowers!"

"Oh, so that's why your hands were so dirty!" Skit exclaimed.

Lily nodded. "I was starting to think that the old man was wrong and that the Meadow Plate wasn't here at all when you guys showed up."

"But why look for the Plates at all?" Volkner asked.

"Yeah, and what about that book?" I asked.

"Well, those are actually the same answers." Lily leaned forward. "You see, in his pokemon journey, before he started his search for the Plates, Grandfather came across a book. It was a book of legends. There was one particular story that caught his imagination—the story about Arceus."

"Arceus?" We all said at the same time.

_"__Cynda?"_

_ " __Mrrrrp?"_

"Arceus." Lily repeated. "The legend goes like this:" She leaned back and closed her eyes. "'Long ago, before the world began, there was an egg. Suddenly, the egg broke open and Arceus was born! Sixteen Plates encircled it, giving it the power to become any type of pokemon it wished. Using the power of the Plates, Arceus created Sinnoh, the lake guardians, and the creation trioâ€'"

"Lake guardians?"

"Creation trio?"

Skit and I asked at almost the same time.

"The lake guardians are Uxie, Mesprit, and Azelf. They guard Verity, Acuity, and Valor lakes, and are said to have given humans the power to know, feel emotions, and possess willpower. The creation trio is Dialga, the master of time, Palkia, the master of space, and Giratina." Lily explained.

"Oh," said Skit.

"Please continue," Volkner said.

"Alright, so 'Arceus created Sinnoh, the lake guardians, and the creation trio using the power of the plates. Time passed; people and pokemon dwelled together in harmonyâ€'"

"Wait, who created the other pokemon and all the people?"

Volkner elbowed me in the ribs.

"It doesn't say," Lily answered. "Anyway, 'Time passed; people and pokemon began to die from hunger and thirst. Having compassion of its creation, Arceus cast down the sixteen Plates, which brought life and prosperity once more to Sinnoh. Exhausted, with only the Normal-type Plate to give it powerâ€"which had long past merged with Arceusâ€"Arceus left to a place between dimensions, to rest and regain its power.' The legend goes on to say that if all of the Plates are gathered together, than Arceus will reappear." Lily finished.

"Wow," I said. "What a story! Do you actually believe it?"

"The part about Arceus coming from an egg and creating Sinnoh seems a bit far-fetched to me." Volkner said, skeptically.

"I myself don't believe that part," Lily replied to me, "but my Grandfather always said that there was a grain of truth in every legend."

"And so you think that if you can gather all the Plates Arceus will come to you?" Skit asked.

Lily glanced at Shaymin, "Yes, I really do think so."

_"__And we think we know where the next Plate is!"_

6. Chapter 6!-Iron Will

Chapter 6

Iron Will

"You do?" We all leaned forward.

Lily nodded. "I have a hunch."

"Well, where?" Skit burst out.

"Have you ever heard of Fuego Ironworks?" Lily asked.

Skit and I shook our heads.

"Well, yes," Volkner replied. "But only on maps."

Lily leaned forward slightly and dropped her voice to a whisper. "I've heard from a reliable source that a perfect rectangular piece of remarkably pure metal was discovered recently on Iron Island and brought to Fuego Ironworks."

"And you think it's the Plate," Skit filled in the blank.

Lily nodded. "Fuego Ironworks is right near here, on the way to Eterna. If you want to come and help me convince the owner's to borrow the Plate—" Lily trailed off, waiting for our response.

"Yeah!" I jumped up and Cyndaquill tumbled from my lap. "That sounds awesome!"

Volkner stood up too. "It's not everyday that you get a chance to meet a legendary pokemon."

"What do you think, Silk?" Skit asked her Delcatty.

"__Mrrrp!"_ Silk jumped up.

"__Silk said that she's in!"_ Shaymin translated.

"Well, if they're in, I'm in too!" Skit stood. "I think it sounds fun!"

"Great!" Lily gathered all the Plates and stood up. "Then let's go!"

* * *

><p>Lily was right. Fuego Ironworks was pretty close. A short hike and a splash through the stream later (Cyndaquill was lucky, it got to ride on my head while I got soaked) we were standing outside Fuego Ironworks.<p>

Lily paused. "What if they say no?" She asked, suddenly worried. "To get so far, only to be refused?"

_"You're not going to know unless you try!" _Shaymin exclaimed.
"No use waiting around out here! Let's just go in already!"

Lily took a deep breath. "You're right, Shaymin," She smiled at it.
"Let's go."

"Aren't I always?" Shaymin replied as we walked though the sliding doors.

"Welcome to Fuego Ironworks," The receptionist said. "How may I help you?"

I stared. Fuego Ironworks wasn't at all what I thought it'd be like. It didn't look nearly as big as it did outside and it looked more like a museum. In fact, that was exactly what this room was. I saw a sign on the back of the room

****Fuego ****Ironworks Museum****the History of Fuego Ironworks****

The room was really well sound-proofed because behind the back wall I only heard the faint sound of machinery. By the time it took me to register that we weren't in the actual factory part of the factory, Lily was already talking to the receptionist.

"Yes, ma'am," Lily replied, "I'd like to talk to the owner, if that's possible?"

"Yes, I can set up an appointment for you at

"Actually," Lily interrupted, "it's quite urgent. Could we see him now?"

"I'm sorry miss, but that's quite impossible. Mr. Fuego is out on Iron Island on business, but if you like, I can call the floor manager."

"Yes, please," Lily bobbed her head.

The receptionist picked up a phone. "Chuck? There are some people who would like to talk to you out in the museum. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Right. Bye." She looked up. "Mr. Roberts will be with you shortly. Please feel free to explore our museum as you wait."

"Thank you," Lily said.

"Well, that went well," Volkner remarked. "Do you know where the Plate is?"

Lily frowned in concentration. "I'm not quite sure, but it feels really close."

"Yeah, really close!" Hollered Skit from the other side of the museum. "I think it's right here!"

"Really?" Lily exclaimed and rushed over.

"Yep, it looks just like the others, and read the plaque."

I peered around Skit. Sure enough, there was a rectangular slate-grey

piece of metal that looked just like the other Plates on display. The plaque read: 'Discovered on Iron Island by Fuego Ironworks' employees with a date just a few weeks ago.

"Yes, that's definitely it," Lily said slowly and reached a hand to touch the glass that covered the Plate.

_"__I wanna see! I wanna see! You,"_ Shaymin nudged my leg, _"pick me up so I can see the Plate!"_

I rolled my eyes but complied. "Here, can you see better now?" I asked, somewhat sarcastically.

_"__Humph, the glass blocks my view, but I guess it's okay."_

Skit and I exchanged a glance and rolled our eyes.

"Are you the people who wanted to see me?"

We all jumped. I turned around to see a pretty buff guy in worker's overalls.

"Y-yes," Lily stammered, startled.

"Well, I'm Chuck Robbins, floor manager for Fuego Ironworks."

Lily shook his hand. "Lily, Lily Carae, and these are my friends, JT, Skit, and Volkner."

Mr. Robbins gave us each a polite nod. "Now, what was it that you wanted to see me about?"

"Um," Lily hesitated, but then squared her shoulders and spoke confidently. "It's about this Plate here, sir. I was wondering if you'd let me have it."

Mr. Robbins furrowed his brow. "I'm sure you know miss, that Fuego Ironworks isn't in the habit of just giving away its property."

"Well, not keep it, of course-at least I don't think so-but just borrow it," Lily was acting a bit flustered. To calm herself, she took a deep breath. "Have you ever heard of the legend of Arceus?" She said confidently.

"Well, I don't see what that has to do with this conversation, but actually, yes. My grandmamma always told it to me when I was a kid as I sat on her lap."

I couldn't imagine Mr. Chuck Robbins as a kid, much less a kid sitting on his grandma's lap.

"Then you're familiar with the term 'elemental Plates'?" She questioned.

"Why, yesâ€" " Mr. Robbins' eyes grew wide. "You don't thinkâ€"?"

Lily nodded. "I think this is the Iron Plate."

"Well," Mr. Robbins stroked his chin and seemed to be considering how much merit he should give to a legend. "I guess I can call my boss and see what he says. Give me a sec," He whipped out a cell phone and pushed several numbers. After a few seconds, "Darn, I forgot: no cell-reception in the factory." He turned to us. "Excuse me for a moment, will you?" He strolled outside.

"Ooo, do you think he's going to say yes?" Lily shivered in anticipation and nervousness.

"Well, he could sayâ€" " Volkner started but Shaymin interrupted him.

_"Of course he's going to say yes!" _Shaymin scoffed. _"There's no way we did all this work and searched this long just to be refused when we're only missing one Plate!"_

"I sure hope you're right," Lily replied.

"Of course I'm right! Besides, if he says no, I will give him such pain as he's never felt before in his lifeâ€" "

Skit and I exchanged a glance. I might have feared for Mr. Robbins' health if it had been anything _but_ a cute little green hedgehog with a flower threatening himâ€"not to mention that Shaymin was categorized under the 'Gratitude Pokemon'. Gratitude and threats don't seem to go well together. Of course, it was also _because_ it was a cute little green hedgehog with a flower that was threatening him that I believed Shaymin might actually carry out the threat.

Just then, Mr. Robbins walked back through the front door. Shaymin quickly shut up about all the nasty things she would do to him.

"You're in luck," Mr. Robbins said. "Mr. Fuego said you could have it."

"Really?" Lily was practically jumping up and down; meanwhile, Shaymin was puffed up with pride. "When would you like us to return it?"

Mr. Robbins shook his head. "Nope, no borrowing. You can keep it."

"Really?!" Lily face suddenly fell. "How much?"

Mr. Robbins laughed. "Nothing! You can just keep it! Turns out Mr. Fuego's mother also used to tell him about the legends, and he wants to know if they're true. Besides, the Plate's not doing us any good. At first everyone was all excited because it was so pure and so perfectly shaped, but it was so small we couldn't really do anything with it besides display it." Mr. Robbins explained. "If you hadn't come asking for it, we'd probably melt it down and mix it with some other metal eventually." He shrugged. "Of course, that would take away all its purity, but you gotta make a profit somehow." He lifted the glass covering and handed Lily the Plate. "Enjoy. Hey, tell me if it actually works!"

"We will!" Lily called, waving as we exited Fuego Ironworks. "Now all

we have to do is find a good spot to summon Arceus!"

* * *

><p>We settled on a large, grassy field just out of sight of Fuego Ironworks. Lily had laid out the Plates in a circle and now we were all gathered around.<p>

"What now?" Skit asked.

"Well, according to the book, Arceus should appear." Lily looked up from the open book on her lap and frowned.

"Maybe I'm blind," I rubbed my eyes, "but I don't see any Arceus. Is it really small?"

_"Of course not," _Shaymin retorted. _"Arceus looks like-likeâ€|"_" She trailed off.

"Like this," Lily showed us a page from her book. Shaymin was right.

"It looks like a-like aâ€"

"Like a pokemon that you couldn't possibly describe." Skit interrupted me.

"It looks like a reindeer to me."

We all turned and stared at Volkner.

"What?" He shrugged. "It looks like a really weird, white reindeer that's trying to hula-hoop!"

We couldn't help it, we all burst out laughing.

"So, what are we doing wrong?" Skit asked, always blunt.

"I don't know," Lily answered, frustrated. "The book isn't very clear about that. It says, 'if, in a circle, one places the Plates as they were seen, Arceus will return to claim what once was its own.' I always took that to mean the order I had found them." She pointed to each Plate in the circle. "See, first the Zap, Stone, and Insect Plates, because those are the ones my Grandfather found, then the Draco Plate, the other Plates, and the last two are the Meadow Plate and the Iron Plate."

"But, what if," Volkner suggested, "your Grandfather didn't find the Zap, Stone, and Insect Plates in that order?"

"Oh, no!" Lily wailed, "And I don't know what order he found them in!"

"Well, just try different combinations till it works," I suggested.

"Oh, of course," Lily smiled and rearranged the Plates: Stone, Insect, Zap; Zap, Insect, Stone; Insect, Zap, Stone. Lily tried all the possible combinations, doubling some a few times when we lost track. (_"No, you did that one already!"_) None of the combinations

worked.

"This is hopeless!" Lily despaired. "How could we have possibly gotten this far only to get stuck with the right arrangement of the Plates!"

We all sat in silence for a few minutes. I myself was trying to do the math to figure out how many combinations possible there were with sixteen Plates. I hadn't found the answer when Skit spoke, but I knew that it was large enough that we could be stuck arranging Plates for the rest of our lives before hitting upon the right combination.

"What ifâ€¦" Skit said slowly. We all leaned forward to listen. "What if the book didn't mean 'appeared' as in the way you found them, but 'appeared' as in the way they were listed in the book?"

"__Well, duh! I can't believe none of you thought about that before now!" _

Lily glared at Shaymin. "I don't remember you suggesting that!"

That shut Shaymin up.

"Okay," Volkner interrupted, "So, what's the order in the book?"

"Uh, Flame Plate," Skit shifted the Flame Plate, "Splash Plate," I moved that one, "Zap Plate, Meadow Plate," Soon Volkner, Skit and I were moving and shifting Plates around like it was a giant jigsaw puzzle! "Icicle Plate, Fist Plate, Toxic Plate, Earth Plate," Lily looked up in time to see Volkner putting a light-brown plate after a purple one, "Wait! Other way!" Volkner paused. Lily reached over and switched the Plates on either side of the Toxic Plate. "The light-brown one is the Fist Plate and the dark-brown one is the Earth Plate. Okay, um, Earth Plateâ€¦Sky Plate!" We continued our puzzle. "Mind Plate, Insect Plate, Stone Plate, Spooky Plate, Draco Plate, Dread Plate, and last but not least, Iron Plate!" Skit slid the last Plate into its slot. Lily looked up from the book to examine our work. She nodded, "Yep, looks good. If this doesn't work, than I don't know what will."

We stepped back to admire our work. Sixteen brightly colored Plates lay in an almost perfect circle in the grass at our feet.

"So, what if Arceus doesn't come?" Skit voiced the fear that we all felt.

"Then," Lily said with a sigh, "all our work would be for nothâ€¦"Whoa!"

We all jumped back as a bright light shot into the sky.

"Yikes! What is that?" I peered through my fingers. "Oh, myâ€¦"

"What?" Skit squeaked. "Is it safe to look?"

I took my hands down from my face. "Uh, yeah, I don't think you want to miss this."

"What?" Skit took her hands down. "Ohâ€¦"

_"__Well, I think it worked."_ Shaymin declared the obvious.

Where we had set the Plates, now there were sixteen pillars of light, the color of each pillar corresponding to the color of the Plate. The lights from the glowing Plates shot up into the sky, making a beacon that could be seen for miles around.

_"__Cynda."_

"Yes, Cyndaquill," I said, awed. "I think it worked."

Slowly, as we watched, the light dimmed, sinking back into the Plates below. But just as the light was about to disappear, the glowing Plates began toâ€¦float. They hovered about six feet off the ground and started to spin. At first they stayed level to the ground as they spun, but then they started to gyrate. One side of the circle would go up while the other side would go down. All the while there was a pinpoint of light that was growing bigger in the middle.

"Oh, myâ€¦" Lily stared.

Soon the glowing light enlarged to form the shape of a pokemon. And then it solidified, becomingâ€¦Arceus. We all stood there, mouths open in awe, too stunned to move.

_"__The Plates," _Arceus spoke. Its mouth didn't move but its voice echoed in our minds. _"At long last, the sixteen elemental Plates have been returned to me. For many long I have waited for this day, and at last, it has come to pass. I thank you, humans, for returning them to me." _Arceus stepped from the air to the earth, its feet gently touching the ground, hardly bending a blade of grass. The Plates encircling it slowed their spiraling dance, but never stopped spinning. Before any of us could recover enough from Arceus's first speech, it spoke again, this time looking exactly at Lily. _"What is your name?"_

Lily stared for a second, then, with trembling voice, she answered: "Lily."

_"__Lily. And you?" _Arceus glanced at each of us in turn.

Volkner started, "Uh, Volkner." Arceus nodded and turned to Skit.

"Skit," She answered before it asked the question.

Arceus fixed its eyes on me. Its gaze was piercing. I felt like it would know, could guess somehow, if I tried to lie. I took a deep breath and answered.

"JT."

_"__Lily, Volkner, Skit, andâ€¦JT." _Arceus cast one last look at me before turning its gaze to the pokemon. _"And these must be your pokemon. Cyndaquill, Delcattyâ€¦"_

_"__Mrrrp!"_

A sound like a soft laugh, or a chuckle echoed in my mind. _"Silk, yes, of course. Ah, and a small Shaymin."_

_ "___Hey! I'm not small!" _Shaymin retorted. _"Or, well, I may be small on the outside, but I've got a big heart!"_

Arceus laughed again. _"I apologize, I meant no offense."_

_ "___Well, I guess that's okay, then." _Shaymin replied.

"Please—Arceus?" Lily spoke hesitantly, clutching the book tightly to her chest. "Will you tell me—Is the legend really true? About you making Sinnoh?"

Arceus answered with a chuckle. _"Making Sinnoh? Ah, humans: always twisting and skewing until the truth is lost amid the story. Of course, there's always a grain of truth in every legend."_

Lily let out a small gasp. "That's exactly what my Grandfather would always say!"

_ "___Your Grandfather," _Arceus tilted its head slightly to the side and observed Lily. _"Yes, I see him in you. Possessing a quiet determination, an iron will; never quitting until the deed is done, no matter what everyone else says; defeating whatever obstacles bar the way; but kind, compassionate, helping people whenever possible, even if it means forsaking your goal temporarily to do so."_

Lily dropped to her knees, tears brimming in her eyes. "That sounds just like Grandfather," She said softly.

_ "___I wasn't talking about him," _Arceus stared strait at Lily.

Lily gulped, trying to stem off tears, but couldn't help it: she burst into sobs, putting her face in her hands. Through her tears, her voice slightly muffled from her hands, Lily choked out, "Grandfather was right! He was right all along!"

What is it about seeing people cry and then feeling like you're going to cry yourself? I rubbed my eyes to keep them from overflowing, trying to tell myself that they were just watering, but knowing that wasn't true. To my relief, I spotted Volkner and Skit doing the same.

_ "___Yes," _Arceus gazed at each of us, _"each one of you are kind and loving. I can feel your pokemon's love for you even from here," _Arceus looked at Volkner, _"even from their pokeballs. Ever since you chose your pokemon and began your journey," _Arceus glanced at Lily, _"or rescued it, their love for you has been growing by the day. Your bonds are strong, keep it that way." _Arceus looked up, _"Now, it is time for me to go. I thank you again, Lily, Volkner, Skit, JT, and of course the pokemon: Cyndaquill, Silk, and Shaymin. I thank each one of you for the part you played in returning my Plates to me." _Arceus began to rise slowly into the air. _"Farewell, I will forever remember you—Aah!" _Crackling with boundless energy, a Thunderbolt attack struck Arceus.

"Golbat, now!"

__Golbat!__ A Golbat swooped in and snatched a Plate from injured Arceus!

__No!__ Arceus recovered quickly.

"What?!" Lily shrieked and we all spun around just in time to see Saturn take the Iron Plate from Golbat's grasp.

"Hahaha!" Saturn laughed and held the Plate up triumphantly. "Now we have everything we need! To the Valley Windworks!"

"We won't let you get away with this!" I yelled.
"Cyndaquill!"

__Cyndaquill!__

"Raichu, come out and fight!" Volkner threw his pokeball.

__Raichu!__

"Silk!" Skit yelled.

__Mrraow!__

"Oh, please," Saturn waved his hand dismissively, "Toxicroak, Sludge Bomb."

__Toxa!__

****BOOM BOOM BOOM!****

"Ahh!" The explosions sent us and our pokemon flying backwards! I landed hard on my back, the breath knocked out of me.

__No! I will not allow it!__ Arceus thundered. __These humans worked hard to return my Plates to me! I will not just stand by as you blatantly abuse your power and steal my Plate in front of my eyes!__

"Oh, too bad," Saturn smirked.

I propped myself up on my elbow and glanced frantically around for Cyndaquill. I spotted it lying not too far from where I had landed.

"Cyndaquill, are you alright?" I asked and reached my hand out to it.

__Cyndaaâ€¦!__ It replied weakly.

__Prepare to meet my wrath!__ Arceus boomed.
__Judgementâ€¦!__

Saturn narrowed his eyes. "Bronzong, Hyper Beam."

__Brong!__ Bronzong's cry was like that of a large bell as it launched its Hyper Beam attack.

_"__No!"_ The Hyper Beam struck Arceus and sent it barreling into the ground. The Plates which had encircled it came loose and flew in all directions, riddling the ground with small craters.

_"__I will not let you!"_ Arceus pushed up onto its knees.

"I believe I already have," Saturn replied and slashed his hand down in a signal to the two grunts that stood behind him holding some sort of cannon-like device.

I watched all this with wide eyes, my hand on Cyndaquil's back, too weak to do anything else. "No!" I whispered in horror as the cannon shot a net that seemed to be made of red lightening bolts at Arceus.

_"__Aaaahhhh!"_ Arceus screamed as the net trapped it.

"Shaymin!" Lily screamed to her pokemon.

_"__I'm on it!"_ Shaymin pushed itself to its feet. _"Seed Flare!"_

"Too late," Saturn smirked just as several devices dropped from the ship (which had been quite invisible a few moments ago, I might add) above and landed with a thump around us. Quick as a blink, the devices sent some sort of shimmering field around us, ceiling us in a dome. Shaymin's Seed Flare hit the force-field, barely causing it to ripple.

"We're trapped!" Skit exclaimed.

"Grrrr!" Volkner pushed himself onto an elbow. "Raichu, Thunder attack!"

_"__Rai!"_

****BOOM, CRASH!****

"Hahaha!" Saturn's laugh was slightly muffled by the unfazed-force field. "This specially-engineered force-dome has been designed to withstand a Tyranitar's Hyper Beam! There's no way you can get through it!" Saturn turned and walked to his ship (which had landed by now). As if as an afterthought, Saturn turned around and yelled, "Enjoy your stay! It's going to be a long one!"

7. Chapter 7!-Gracidea

Chapter 7

Gracidea

"Grrrrr!" Volkner got to his feet as Saturn's ship buzzed off. "Raichu, try Thunder again!"

_"__Chuuuu!"_

ZZZZzzaapp!

"Cyndaquill!" I stood shakily and scooped Cyndaquill into my arms.

"__Cyndaaaâ€|"__ It said weakly.

"Silk!" I heard Skit yell and turned to see her kneeling beside the Delcatty's side. "Oh, Silkâ€|"

"__Mrrrâ€|"__

Skit smiled sadly. "Thank you for trying to help. Here, you need a rest," Skit took a pokeball from her pocket. "Silk, return." Silk disappeared into the pokeballâ€"this was the first time I had ever seen Skit recall it. Skit turned and looked around, assessing our situation. "Do you think there's a way to break out?" She asked.

Volkner shook his head, glancing at Raichu. It was panting hard. "I don't know," He replied. "Raichu, you're exhausted, return."

Dyooit. Raichu disappeared.

"That was my strongest move," He said, staring at the clear bubble which entrapped us, "and it didn't even faze it."

"__I am going to put that guy through a world of hurt as soon as I get out!"_ Shaymin ranted. "_I'm going toâ€"_"_

"Shaymin, stop," Lily said quietly and looked up from staring into her lap. "We're never going to get out of here."

Surprisingly, Shaymin stayed quiet.

"Maybe Arceus can help us," Skit suggested. "But first thing's first, somebody help me get this net off it!" She was holding one end of the net. Now that it was no longer charged, I could see that the net was woven from some kind of metal and looked pretty heavy.

"Yeah," I said, rushing over. Volkner joined us and, with a heave, we managed to drag the net off Arceus. Arceus groaned.

"Oh, Arceus!" Lily rushed over and placed her hands on Arceus's head. "I'm so sorry! This never would have happened if I hadn't gone searching for the Platesâ€"_" She burst into tears again.

"__Stop."_ Arceus's voice held such command that Lily immediately stopped sobbing. "_My Plates had to be returned sometime. It is not your fault that another person chose to cause harm while I was here."_

"You-you don't blame me?" Lily asked.

"__Of course not."_

"Can you help us get out?" Volkner asked.

"__No, I haven't the power." _Arceus sighed and closed its eyes. "_Returning here used much of the power I had reserved and, while I

managed to obtain a little power from the Plates before they were blasted away from me, I am still too weak to break through this wall." _

"And hurt," Lily said. "You need to rest Arceus."

"But, how are we going to get out?" I asked.

"Pokemon attacks just don't faze this force-dome." Volkner replied. "Oh, what I would give for a pokemon that knows Dig." He sat down.

"Me too," I sat down next to him and tried to think. "How about we try attacking the force field all together?"

Several attacks and exhausted pokemon (and a misaimed Thunder Bolt attack from Raichu that shocked all of us) later, we were no farther than we had started.

"We're going to be trapped here forever!" Lily started to break down again.

_"__Oh, Lily, don't cry!"_ Shaymin rubbed up against Lily's leg.

"Yeah, Lily," Skit said. "Instead of focusing on what's going on right now, how about you tell us how you and Shaymin met?"

_"__Yeah! That's a fun story, Lily!"_ Shaymin said.

"Wellâ€¦" Lily hesitated.

"I think that would be a cool story," I said.

"C'mon, Lily." Volkner encouraged. "Tell us!"

_"__I would enjoy listening to such a story,"_ Arceus spoke up.

"Well, I guess." She wiped away her tears. "It's not much of a story, I'm afraid."

_"__Saving my life isn't much of a story? I object!"_ Shaymin's remark had its desired affect: Lily laughed.

"You see, it happened while I was up north, searching for the Icicle Plate." She began. "There had been this awful snowstorm. It was absolutely freezing and I had just built this fire to warm myself up when I heard someone call for help. I ran to see who it was and I discovered a bunch of Snover surrounding Shaymin! The poor thing had been caught in the snowstorm and nearly froze. It had grabbed a few berries to eat but the Snover were also hungry and wanted the berries so they had surrounded Shaymin and were about to attack it! I stepped in and we came to a compromise. Shaymin helped me find the Icicle Plate and has been with me ever since."

_"__It was a _bit_ more dramatic than that."_ Shaymin said. _"There was this one Snover who was about to attack me with Ice Shard but Lily stepped in and took the attack instead!"_

"Really?" I asked.

Lily blushed. "I wasn't thinking," She replied.

"That's such a neat story!" Skit exclaimed.

_ "__You truly have a caring heart."_ Arceus said.

"Actually," Lily looked down, "I have a confession to make. I lied when I said I was looking for red flowers for the shop!" She burst into tears again.

"Oh, Lily," Skit said. "But you told us you were looking for the Meadow Plate?"

Lily shook her head, sobbing. "I didn't tell you the whole truth! I was actually looking for pink flowers, specifically a Gracidea, because Gracideas cause Shaymin to morph to Sky Form and I thought a Sky Form Shaymin would help me find the Meadow and Iron Plates." She sniffled. "And then you guys showed up, and I thought of an excuse, fast, because I thought the more people who knew about the legend of Arceus the more people would look for the Plates! But when I saw how nice you were, I told you all about the Plates, but I was too ashamed to say that I lied to you about the red flowers!"

We all looked at each other.

"Lilyâ€" Volkner started.

"I know! Just go ahead and say it! You don't want to be friends with me anymore!"

"No," Volkner said, shocked. "That's not at all what I was going to say."

"You mean," Lily blinked, "you still want to be my friends?"

_ "__Duh!"_ Shaymin said. _"Who wouldn't want to be friends with you?"_

"What Shaymin's trying to say," Skit stepped in, "is that we understand why you lied to protect your Grandfather's dream. That doesn't make it right, but we won't stop being your friend just because you lied about the color of flowers you were picking."

_ "__Cynda!"_

"Yeah," I said. "We had a great time!"

"I think you may be a bit overwhelmed right now, Lily." Volkner said. "Take a deep breath. Good!"

Lily let her breath out with a whoosh. "I'm sorry for getting all weepy on you." She said.

"It's okay!" I said brightly. "Team Galactic does that to people."

"Here, this may make you feel better," Skit took the flower from

behind her ear and tucked it into Lily's hair.

"Thank you," Lily sniffed. "I don't deserve friends like you."

"Nonsense!" Volkner said. "You're one of the nicest people I've ever met!"

Lily giggled. "Hmmm? This flower smells nice. What is it?" She asked.

"Uh, I don't know." Skit said. "I found it right before JT tripped over Shaymin."

_"__Yeah! That really hurt!"_

I blushed. "Sorry," I mumbled.

"Hmmm!" Lily twirled the pink flower between her fingers, a look of intense concentration on her face. "It smells familiar! Is it? Could it be?" Lily took a deep breath, breathing in the scent of the flower. "I think it is!" A look of wonder crossed her face.

"What?" Skit asked.

"I've only seen them once, when my Grandfather brought me a bouquet when I was a little girl, but I've never forgotten the smell! I think!" I think this is a Gracidea!"

"Really?" Volkner asked.

"Shaymin, come here!" Lily said excitedly, holding out the flower.

_"__Mmmm, well, it certainly smells nice!"_ Shaymin started to glow.

We all gasped.

"Is it evolving?" I asked.

"I think it's!" it's changing form!" Volkner exclaimed.

"Oh cool!"

Shaymin stopped glowing. Now it was almost twice the size it was before!

_"__Whoooo!"_ Shaymin jumped into the air and started to fly in circles around the dome. _"Look at me! I can fly!"_

"I changed into Sky Form!" Volkner exclaimed.

"Hey," A thought crossed my mind. "Do you think it could break out of this force-dome?"

"Well!" Lily mused. "Sky Form is a lot stronger than Land Form. It's worth a try! Shaymin?"

_"__No problem! Sit back and watch the Shaym-ster at work! Leaf

Storm!"_

With crippling power, the attack struck the force-dome, making it shiver and bulge out, before settling back into place.

"Almost!" Volkner exclaimed. "Let's get a little more fire-power! Raichu!"

_"__Chuuu!"_

"Aaahhh!" Skit and I dove behind Arceus, not keen on getting shocked again.

"Scaredy cats," Volkner said with a frown. "Raichu, Thunder!"

_"__Chuuuuu!"_

_ " __Leaf Storm!"_

TZZZZZBOOM!

WHSSSSSCRAACK!

"Almost!" Volkner declared.

_"__Let me help," _Arceus stumbled to its feet.

"Arceus!" Lily exclaimed. "But you need to rest!"

_"__If this doesn't work, than I'll have plenty of time to rest."_

_ " __Ooh, yeah!"_ Shaymin did a flip in the air. _"More fire-power!"_

"C'mon," I jumped to my feet. "No good letting them have all the fun! Ready Cyndaquill?"

_"__Cynda!"_

"Silk?" Skit stood up too, releasing Silk from its pokeball.

_"__Mrrow!"_

"Thunder attack, Raichu!"

"Shaymin, Leaf Storm!"

"Cydaquill, Ember!"

"Covet, Silk!"

_"__Last Resort!"_

SWOOOOSHHH! Crackâ€"BOOM!

The attacks swirled and struck the force-field with a sound like thunder! A hole was ripped open and the force-dome dissolved.

_ "___Oh, yeah! Take that Team Galactic! Time to feel my wrath!"_ Shaymin did a few loop-de-doos and spirals.

"We did it!" I yelled and high-fived Skit.

"Awesome, JT!" Volkner said. More high-fives all around.

"Yes!" Lily jumped up and down. "We're free!"

_ "___Now, for my Plates."_

Where all the Plates had landed, they started to glow. With a whoosh, they returned to Arceus.

"Oh, yeah!" I pumped my fist in the air. "Let's go get Team Galactic!"

Arceus turned to me, _"You don't have to do that. You have already done more than enough. They stole my Plate, it I who have to deal with them, you don't have to come along."_

I exchanged a glance with Cyndaquill.

_ "___Cyndaquill!"_

I nodded, looked up. "Cyndaquill and I are coming. We're going to help you get your Plate back no matter what!"

Volkner nodded. "We started this; we're planning to stick this through to the end!"

Skit crossed her arms, "No way are you leaving me behind!"

_ "___Mrrrp!"_

_ "___Just let me at 'em! They'll rue the day they ever messed with the warrior of the skies!"_

"I'm with Shaymin." Lily said.

"Let's do this thing!" I yelled.

_ "___Then hop on,"_ Arceus dropped to its knees and we all clambered aboard.

"Awesome!" I said. "I've never rode on a legendary pokemon before!"

_ "___Hold on tight!"_

I watched with interest as the Plates stopped spinning and one took center place, a light-blue Plate the same color as the sky.

_ "___Fly!"_ Arceus leapt into the air.

"Yikes!" Skit shrieked, Lily whooped.

"Grandfather would've loved this!" She yelled.

I looked over Arceus, to the rushing ground below. The wind rustled my hair. My Mom would have a fit if she had seen how tangled it was when I got off!

_"__Where did they say they were headed?"_ Arceus asked.

"Valley Windworks!" Volkner yelled above the wind.

"It's not too far from here!" Lily yelled. "Hang a left!"

Arceus spun smoothly to the left.

"Eeek!" Skit screamed, screwing her eyes shut and clutching Arceus tightly. "Tell me when it's all over!"

I turned and shook Skit's shoulder slightly. "C'mon, Skit! Open your eyes! It's amazing!"

"Nope, nada, no way!"

_"__Cyndaquill!"_

_ "___Mrrp!"_

"It's awesome, Skit!" I urged her, "Not nearly as bad as you think! Just look!"

Slowly, Skit cracked one eye. She gasped, opened both eyes wide.

"Oh, myâ€" She looked over Arceus. "This is _amazing!_" She laughed. "You can see everything from up here!"

She was right. I spotted the river we had sloshed through earlier. A Finneon leapt from the water, sun sparkling off its scales. We passed over a forest, the trees looking tiny from so high, like bushes, or shrubs. A Krickatot buzzed over the treetops, a Bidoof scrambled for cover, a Wurmple clung to a tree trunk. Then we were passing over a field, Pachirisu dashed to and fro, playing. I spotted a Drifblim riding the wind. Several large wind turbines caught the breeze, turned it into electricity. Then the Valley Windworks itself came into view, and with it, Team Galactic's ship hovering right over.

_"__Going down!"_ Arceus touched down in the field gently. We all leapt off.

"That was awesome!" Skit exclaimed, adjusting her bandana.

I elbowed her. "Told ya so."

"Thank you so much Arceus!" Lily said.

_"__Even I have to admit that that was fun."_ Shaymin said, jumping off its perch on Arceus's head and flying around Lily.

Arceus laughed. _"I'm glad you enjoyed it."_

Volkner clapped his hands twice, breaking the post-flight

exhilaration. "I hate to ruin the mood, guys, but we've got a job to do!"

"That's right," Lily nodded. "We didn't come here for nothing."

I looked down at Cyndaquill. "Ready, buddy?"

_"__Cynda!_"_

_"__Then let's go kick some Team Galactic butt!"_

"Whoa!" Volkner held up his hands. "We can't just go charging in there! They have more people and pokemon, we'd be crushed!"

"But we have a legendary pokemon!" I protested.

_"__Volkner is right,"_ Arceus interrupted. _"We need a plan."_

"Well, what's the plan?" Skit asked.

_"__To crush Team Galactic and return the Iron Plate to Arceus!"_

Lily frowned. "That's not much of a plan, Shaymin."

"That's the goal, Shaymin, but we need a plan." Volkner cleared his throat. "First, we need to find out where Team Galactic is, then we can surprise them with an attack from behind. Shaymin can swoop in and grab the Plate, then we high-tail it outta here on Arceus's back."

"Sounds good to me," I began to strut to the doors. "Let's go!"

"Hold it!" Skit yelled. "Won't Team Galactic have posted guards by the front door?"

Volkner nodded. "Skit's right. We'll have to find a back way in."

Skit actually was right. We crawled up the small hill and glanced over. Two Team Galactic grunts and their Golbat guarding the doors. Luckily, the hill had his Arceus's landing from their sight.

"What now?" Lily whispered.

_"__I fly in there and whip their butts: that's what!"_

Volkner shook his head. "No way, too noisy. We crawl through the grass and come around to the side of the building. There should be a side-door."

We crawled army-style through the tall grass, though Arceus had a bit of trouble. We just hoped that the guards were dumber than they looked. As soon as we were out of their sight, behind the building, we stood up and dashed to the side-door.

"How did you know there would be a door here?" Lily asked in a whisper.

"Total guess," Volkner admitted, keeping his voice low. "Alright," He took out his pokeball. "Time to blast this thing down! Raichu!"

"Wait," Skit stepped in front of him, up to the door. She twisted the knob and it opened. She grinned. "Ladies first." She stepped inside. Silk followed her, then Shaymin and Lily.

"Brains over brawn," I tapped my head before stepping inside. Volkner was at my heels.

"__Wait, I'm not sure I can fit."__ Arceus said, still outside.

"Ummm," I turned around. "You sure?"

Arceus looked at the narrow door. "Well, if I make it bigger?"

"Too loud," Volkner shook his head.

"Says the guy who wanted to blast the door open a minute ago." Volkner glared at me, Skit giggled.

"I could wait here with Arceus," Lily suggested.

Volkner was already shaking his head no. "We need you and Shaymin in case we have to battle."

Lily's face fell.

"How about Silk and I wait out here with Arceus," Skit said. "When you find out where Team Galactic is, send someone back, and we can blast through the wall then."

"Okay," Lily relented.

"Sounds good to me." Volkner said.

"Take care, Arceus," Lily said.

Skit waved.

"__Don't worry,"__ Arceus mind-spoke, "__I'll be there when you need me."__

Lily nodded and then turned and followed Volkner and me down the hall.

We turned a corner. This hall was the same except there were doors on either side of the hall.

"Offices," Volkner explained. "Team Galactic wouldn't be in one of those, we need to get to the main power plant."

Suddenly there was a thump, and a muffled voice calling out.

"What was that?" Lily asked. We all froze.

This time when we heard the strange sounds, it was much clearer, and sounded close.

"That sounds like someone calling for help!" I exclaimed in a whisper.

Volkner placed a finger to his lips and crept stealthily to a door. He put his ear to the metal, listening for a minute. He flung the door open.

"Mmmm! Mrrmmm!" There was a man in the office, all tied up with duct tape over his mouth.

"Mmm-mmm! "

"Mrrmm! "

"Grrmm-mmmrr! "

Several other people were also tied up, and at the sight of us they started wriggling and thrashing about.

"Lily, JT, help me untie them!" Volkner knelt and began picking at the knotted rope.

"On it!" I rushed into the room and picked a person at random to begin to untie. "I'll have you out in a jiffy, don't worry!" But, after a few hopeless seconds of picking at the very-well tied knot, I gave up and called Cyndaquill over. "Cyndaquill! A little help?"

_"__Cyndaquill?"_

"I want you to use Ember to burn the ropes off." I explained.

"MMM! Mmmrr-mmm!" The man's eyes got all big and he started to wiggle more. I take it he didn't like my idea.

"Don't worry," I assured, "if you don't wiggle too much, Cyndaquill should be able to avoid burning you."

"MMRRMM! "

"Now stay still. Cyndaquill, Ember!"

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill aimed a carefully directed jet of flame at the ropes. They fell away with not much hassle.

The man ripped the tape off his mouth. "Ouch! Thank goodness you came here!"

Volkner looked up and asked him, just as Lily finished untying the last person, a question; "Who did this to you?"

"They call themselves Team Galactic," He stood and stretched. "They swooped in here and tied me and my workers up; we didn't even have time to fight!"

Volkner glanced at me, then Lily, nodded. Just like we thought.

"Do you know why they tied you up? And where they are now?"

"They said something about needing the power to contact, what was the name?"

"I think they said Cyrus," One of the workers, a young woman in overalls, supplied.

Volkner and I stared at each other in amazement. Contact Cyrus? But he had been the one who disbanded Team Galactic! Was Saturn trying to get the whole team together again?

"Where are they now?" Volkner asked.

"They went up to the roof." Another worker said. The worker that I had untied nodded; he seemed like the person in charge.

"Needed some place for a signal or something, I heard."

Volkner nodded sharply at me and Lily. "Let's go." He turned to leave.

"Wait!" The head guy reached out a hand. "We can help! We all have pokemon, we can fight!"

Volkner glanced at the people in the room. "The less people in the way, the better. I don't want anyone getting hurt."

"They tied us up and took over our plant without a second's thought! We want to get them back!"

The workers in the room nodded, voiced their approval. They cracked their knuckles, drew pokeballs from pockets. Volkner saw all this.

"All right," He agreed. "You can stay down here, keep any Team Galactic grunts from escaping, and hold them until Officer Jenny arrives. Okay with you?"

They didn't seem too happy about it, but everyone nodded. Abruptly, Volkner smacked his forehead.

"Officer Jenny!" He exclaimed. "We forgot to call the police!"

"Already done," A cute, redheaded worker woman walked in, wiping her hands on her overalls. "Go get 'em." She winked.

"How do we get to the roof?" Lily asked.

The head-worker glanced around at his people. "I'll show you," He said. "Benny, organize patrols to keep Team Galactic in. Make sure not one of them makes it out the door alive!"

A well-muscled man nodded and cracked his knuckles. "Gotcha, Tom. All right, boys!" He started, but Lily, Volkner and I were already running down the hall, following Tom.

He pushed through a door. It opened into a wide room, a large piece of machinery reached to the ceiling, converting air power to

electricity. Metal catwalks edged around the walls, reaching to the roof. I stared in amazement.

"These catwalks lead to the conservatory, where the electricity is stored. The dome opens to the sky, perfect place for an antenna."

"Thank you," Volkner said, stepping onto the first step.

"I can still help you!" He called.

Volkner paused, placed his foot back on the ground. He turned to face the worker.

"No, it's too dangerous. Besides, your workers need you here, to help capture any Team Galactic grunts."

Tom seemed to deflate a bit, but he nodded. "Nice knowing youâ€"

"Volkner," Volkner supplied, shaking his outstretched hand.

"Tom," Tom said. "Hey, you wouldn't happen to be the Sunyshore Gym Leaderâ€"

"Later!" Volkner replied, bounding up the steps.

_"__Enough chit-chat, let's go!"_ Shaymin flew up the steps, Lily right behind it. I followed close behind.

"Wait a sec," Tom stared up at us in amazement. "Did that pokemon just talk?"

"Later!" Volkner called down again.

I glanced back once more, in time to see Tom shake his head and walk off, muttering something like, "What is the world coming to?"

I grinned and sprinted up the metal stairs.

It was a long way to the conservatory. With each step, the stairs clanged like a bell. Volkner kept up a relentless pace, running up each flight of stairs, across each catwalk, but Lily and I started to fall behind. With a last gasp of breath, I plopped down on a catwalk.

"I need a break." I gasped out.

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill collapsed at my feet.

"Me too," Lily sat down heavily right next to me, gulping air.

"We haven't time!" Volkner said, annoyed.

"Justâ€|a quickâ€|breather!" Lily managed between pants.

_"__Too bad humans can't fly,"_ Shaymin buzzed around our heads. _"It would be so much faster."_

"Even you can't fly all the time," I retorted. "Or, wait, can

you?"

"No," Lily said. "Shaymin returns to Land Form once the sun starts to go down. Or if it gets frozen," She added as an afterthought.

"Alright, enough rest! Come on, we gotta go!" Volkner said.

I groaned and stood up.

_"__I could fly ahead of you!"_ Shaymin suggested.

"No!" Lily exclaimed. "You are staying with me!"

_"__Spoil sport." _

It wasn't too long before we reached the door to the roof. Only problem wasâ€"we weren't alone.

"Hey, you!" One of the two Team Galactic grunts yelled. "Glameow, Shock Wave!"

_"__Glameow!"_

"Duck!" Volkner yelled. I dived to the groundâ€"er, catwalk.

"Shaymin!" Lily shrieked, hands covering her head.

_"__On it!" _Shaymin flew up. _"Seed Flare!"_

BOOM!

The grunts went flying. Quickly, we ran past the unconscious grunts to the door.

"It's open!" Volkner declared. He cracked it open and we peered through.

The conservatory was a basically a large, white dome on the roof. Four generators were placed around the edge, used for storing electricity and sending it to the towns. Except now they weren't providing electricity to the towns, but to Saturn's evil device! Wires snaked from the four generators, carrying electricity which powered the large, metal machine in the middle. Several Team Galactic grunts were scattered over the roof, guarding the thing. Saturn stood by it, watching something. As we watched, a man in a white lab coat with crazy hair stepped from behind the device.

"Done," He said to Saturn, wiping his hands on his coat. "Now all I need is the Iron Plate." He held out his hand.

"Very well," Saturn placed the Plate into the scientist's outstretched palm. "Are you sure this will work, Dr. Ferretti?"

"Positive," Dr. Ferretti slid the Plate into a slot. "The Iron Plate will act as aâ€"a conductor, of sorts. It will allow the radio waves to broadcast on all frequencies at once, overriding any previous waves. Cyrus is sure to hear your message."

Saturn nodded.

"Of course," Dr. Ferretti continued, "this is only possible with such high-grade metal. It is almost a blessing that that Shadow character, that masked menace showed up and ruined our mining operation near Oreburgh. Of course, that tunnel collapse was quite unsavory butâ€"

I gasped. Volkner put his finger to his lips, urging me to be quiet. I nodded, making a zipping motion with my fingers. So it was Team Galactic who had caused the cave-in which made me go the long way around to Hearthome! I pressed my eye back against the crack.

"What do you think the chances are that he got caught in the cave-in?" Saturn asked as he paced back and forth in front of the radio broadcaster.

"Quite high, I'd say," Dr. Ferretti replied. "There's no way that that Shadow character could have escaped the blast."

I clamped my mouth shut, trying not to make a noise. I remembered how Shadow had saved me and my friends when Team Galactic took over Jubilife City. I hoped heâ€or sheâ€was alright!

"Though, with the luck we've been having latelyâ€|" Saturn paced. I thought of Mars and Jupiter.

"Shadow?" Lily breathed the question.

'Later' Volkner mouthed.

"Is the broadcaster ready?" Saturn turned abruptly to face the scientist.

"Of course! All I need to do is flip this switch and you are free to contact Cyrus! Of course, the conservatory dome will need to be opened."

"Of course," Saturn said with a slight smile. He waved a hand and a grunt pushed a button on a remote controller.

"Skit!" Volkner hissed suddenly, spinning to face me. "Someone needs to go get her and Arceus! JT!"

I couldn't help a small moan. "Back down all those stairs?" I complained, but started down.

"No, you're right," Volkner grabbed my shoulder. "It will take too long, and we need all the pokemon and trainers we can get. We just have to hope Skit and Arceus sees what's happening and comes to help." Volkner gazed at the slowly opening dome.

8. Chapter 8!-Judgement

Chapter 8

Judgment

The dome slowly opened. A hole appeared in the conservatory roof, angry black clouds visible in the sky. Wind howled and whipped around the dome. Swirling inside, it billowed out Dr. Ferretti's lab coat, running its chilly fingers through everyone's hair.

"Hmmmâ€¦" Saturn mused. "I forgot how suddenly storms came up around here. No matter." He turned to Dr. Ferretti. "Raise the antenna!"

I stood up, "We need to stop them!"

"No, wait!" Volkner grasped my arm and pulled me back down. "Just wait a little more!"

I sat unhappily, and placed my eye back to the door crack. The dome was still opening. As I watched, the three sides swirled apart, like a flower opening. Only, instead of opening out, the base of the dome disappeared into the roof, leaving the furious storm to lash the grunts fearlessly.

I was amazed at how fast the storm had come up. Not to long ago, the sun had been shining cheerfully in the sky!

"Everyone, get your pokemon out." Volkner whispered. By everyone, I assume he meant himself, and me, because I didn't think Lily had any other Pokemon.

"Raichu, Jolteon, Magnemite!"

_ "___Mag!" _

_ "___Jolt!" _

_ "___Raichu!" _

"Nova, Sucker!"

_ "___Shinx!" _

_ "___Zuuu!" _

_ "___Wait, you named your Shinx Sucker?" _Shaymin asked.

"Zubat," I grumbled.

_ "___Sucker as in lollipop, or Sucker as in loser?" _

"Dr. Ferretti!" Saturn yelled over the wind.

"I am turning on the deviceâ€”now!"

At the same time Volkner yelled, "Now!"

Dr. Ferretti flipped the switch. The device whirred to life. We burst out of the corridor onto the roof.

"Raichu, Magnemite, Jolteon, attack the Golbat!" Volkner yelled.

TZZZAAP!

Two Thunderbolts and a Thunder Shock knocked almost all the Golbat out of the air.

"Cyndaquill, Nova, Sucker!" I ordered.

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill sent an Ember attack at one Golbat.

_"__Zuuu!"_ Sucker used Leech Life on the same Golbat.

_"__Shinx!"_ Nova's Spark attack finished it off.

"Shaymin, get that Plate!" Lily yelled.

_"__On it!"_ Shaymin launched itself at the broadcaster.

Saturn spun around, saw us. "Not so fast!" He took out two pokeballs. "Bronzong, Toxicroak, attack!"

_"__Bronze!"_

_ " __Croak!"_

_"__Aaahhh!"_ Shaymin yelled and crashed to the roof as Toxicroak's Sludge Bomb and Bronzong's Hyper Beam hit it.

"Shaymin!" Lily squealed.

"Oh no!" I exclaimed as I spotted Saturn running for the radio broadcaster.

"We can't let him get there!" Volkner yelled.
"Jolteonâ€"

_"__Golbat!"_ A flock of Golbat blocked Volkner's path. It was as if two Golbat appeared for every one that we had knocked down!

Volkner gritted his teeth. "Thunderbolt!"

_"__Jolt!"_

_ " __Rai!"_

_ " __Gollllll!"_

We used that (very painful) distraction to run past the Golbat.

"Cyndaquillâ€!" I began.

"Uh-uh-uh!" Dr. Ferretti stepped into our path. "Can't have you interrupting Commander Saturn's phone-call, can we?" He threw a pokeball. "Tyranitar, Stone Edge!"

_"__RAAAAARRRR!"_

The sharp rocks flew at me.

"JT!" Volkner dived on top of me. I hit the ground hard. The rocks sliced over us.

"Thanks," I got up onto my hands and knees.

"Oh, no!" Volkner groaned.

I looked behind grinning Dr. Ferretti and saw that Saturn had reached the machine.

"We're too late!"

Saturn grabbed the microphone.

TZZZZZAAAPPPP!

A thunderbolt crashed out of the sky and hit the antenna! Shocked—literally, metal conducts electricity—and hair standing on end; Saturn yelled and fell the ground.

"What?!" Dr. Ferretti screeched.

I looked up. There, right above the antenna, light against the dark sky, Arceus hovered! It touched down and Skit jumped off, hair whipped wild about her face.

"Thought you could use a bit of backup!" She called above the wind. I grinned and flashed her a thumb's up.

"Just in time!" I yelled.

Arceus walked to Lily, who was cradling the injured Shaymin.

"'I'll be there when you need me.'"_ Arceus bent its head down and touched Shaymin. I watched in amazement as all Shaymin's cuts and bruises faded away.

_"__What'd I miss?"_ It cracked an eye. Suddenly it jumped to its feet. _"Wait! You didn't kick Team Galactic butt without me, did you?"_

Arceus chuckled. _"Don't worry; there is still plenty—Team Galactic butt to kick."_ It straightened and turned to Saturn, who was just pushing himself to his feet. _"You didn't think you could steal one of my Plates and escape my Judgment, did you?"_

Saturn stumbled to his feet. "I don't care about you and your stupid Judgment attack!" He spat the words out. "Bronzong, Hyper Beam!"

_"__Bronze!"_

"Of course, you can't leave us out of the fight," Dr. Ferretti's eyes gleamed. "Tyranitar, Hyper Beam too!"

_"__Raaannn!"_

_"__So be it."_ Arceus's feet left the ground. Its Plates shifted, a blue one took center—the Splash Plate. _"Hydro Pump!"_

WHOOOSH! The attack pushed right through the two Hyper Beams and hit Tyranitar, which hit Bronzong, and both of them tumbled through the

air and skidded to a stop near the edge of the roof. Saturn had to dive out of the way to avoid getting wrapped up in the poke-snowball too!

"Tyranitar!" The doctor yelled. Saturn just gritted his teeth and got to his knees.

Now that Saturn was out of the wayâ€”

"Shaymin go get the Plate!" Lily yelled.

_ "___Already on it!" _Shaymin flew at the device.

"Toxicroak, Sludge Bomb!" Saturn ordered.

_ "___Croak!" _

_ "___Umph!" _ Shaymin crashed hard to the ground.

"I'll get it!" Skit yelled and ran at the broadcaster. "Oof!" She did a baseball-style slide under Toxicroak's Sludge Bomb and came to a stop right at the machine. She popped to her feet and triumphantly held up the Iron Plate. "Got it!"

"Whooo, yaaaahh!" I cheered.

"Not so fast," Saturn grabbed her arm.

"Skit!" I yelled.

"Let me go! Let me go, you creep!" Skit kicked and punched at Saturn.

"First give me my Plate!" Saturn grabbed hold of the Iron Plate and tried to rip it out of her hands.

"No!" Skit gasped, holding on to it tighter. "Silk!" She called.

_ "___MRRROW!" _ A very angry Delcatty launched itself at Saturn's face.

"Weak," He raised a hand and batted it aside. "Dr. Ferretti?" He called.

"Of course, already on it." While we had all been distracted, Dr. Ferretti had called up the Team Galactic ship. It now hovered near the edge of the building, a ramp connecting the two allowed boarding.

_ "___No! I will not allow this!" _ Arceus rose up higher in the air.
_ "Judgâ€”" _

"No!" I yelled. "You might hurt Skit!"

Arceus subsided.

"Grrrâ€”|" Volkner growled. "What can we do?"

Saturn began backing to the ship, Skit in tow. "Grunts, cover

us!"

"Yes, sir!" The grunts converged between us and Skit, their Golbat hovering overhead.

"Shaymin!" Lily swiveled her head to and fro, searching for her pokemon.

"__Don't worry!"_ Shaymin called, pushing itself up from where Toxicroak's Sludge Bomb had knocked it. "_I can still fight!"_ It started to glow. "_Oh, poop!"_ A now-Land Form Shaymin declared oh-so accurately.

Saturn smiled thinly. "Sunset. Shaymin returns to Land Form at sunset. And now I have the girl, and the Plate. There is nothing you can do." He backed towards the ship. With his free hand, he reached into his pocket and brought out a pokeball. "Bronzong, return!"

"Of course, I almost forgot." Dr. Ferretti reached into his pocket too. "Tyranitar, return."

"Skit!" I yelled desperately. "Cyndaquil, Sucker, Nova?" I turned to my pokemon. They were exhausted from fighting. "Volkner?" I asked.

"There's nothing we can do," He said, deflated.

"No!" I said. "We've got to do something!"

"__I can still fight!"_ Shaymin ran towards Saturn. "_Seed Fl!"_ It skidded to a stop at Toxicroak's feet. "_Uh-oh."_

"__Toxi!"_

"__Wrong way!"_ Shaymin backtracked quickly. Lily scooped it up.

"Arceus, can't you do something?" She yelled up to it.

"__I can't!"_ Arceus said, pained. "_If I attack, I may hurt her!"_

I watched as Skit was dragged to the ship.

"Let go! Let go!" She fought. Then she looked up, behind me, and her eyes brightened. "Razor!" She called. Saturn looked up. I spun around.

"__Gallade!"_ A green and white flash speeded overhead. It soared over the grunts' heads and landed in front of Saturn. The flash materialized into a Gallade. It lashed out with its blades.

"Aaahhh!" Saturn yelled and threw his arms up to protect his face. He tumbled backwards. "Toxicroak!" He yelled.

"__Toxi!"_ Toxicroak bounded in front of Saturn while he scrambled to his feet.

"Razor, Psycho Cut!" Skit backed up quickly, Iron Plate in

hand.

"__Gallade!"_ Razor slashed with its elbow blades, Toxicroak was sent flying back.

"Toxicroak!" Saturn gritted his teeth and returned the pokemon.

"Catch!" Skit threw the Iron Plate. It soared through the air.

"__Got it!"_ The Plate glowed and flew to Arceus, falling in line with the other Plates.

"Saturn, we need to pull out!" Dr. Ferretti yelled from where he stood in the ship's doorway. He ducked into the safety of the hull.

"Grunts pull out!" Saturn ordered, running to the ship.

"__Not so fast!"_ Arceus flew up high, its Plates shifted. A red one took center place. "_Blast Burn!"_

"Ahhhh!" The grunts went flying.

"__Now, receive my Judgment!"_ Arceus's Plates started swirling around it, faster and faster. Light shot from the Plates up into the air. The light changed direction. It shot towards Saturn.

"Ahhh!" Saturn raised a hand.

"Stop!"

The light paused. It stopped just a few feet from Saturn. Arceus turned to Lily.

"__This man stole my Plate, he injured many people and pokemon, he took your friend hostage! Give me one good reason as to why he doesn't deserve my Judgment!"_

Lily stepped forward, Shaymin in her arms. "He doesn't." She glanced at Saturn. "He doesn't deserve any mercy at all." She faced Arceus again. "But it's wrong to kick a man when he's down! Saturn is defeated. He's down. To kill him!" Her face grew stony. "Who gave you the right to take another life?"

Arceus stopped, stared at Lily. She met his gaze fearlessly.

Skit stepped forward. "Lily's right. People change. Maybe Saturn never will, but we have to give him the chance."

Arceus looked at me and Volkner. I shrugged.

"Skit's right." I said. "Where would I be if I was judged for every wrong choice I made? Where would the world be?"

"But he made his choice," Volkner pointed out. "No one made him bad, made him hurt people and pokemon. He chose to be like this. What if he does it again? Hurts more people and pokemon?" Volkner paused.

"But who are we to decide the fate of a man?" Lily said quietly.

There was silence. Only the wind which howled around us, whipped Lily's hair around her. Only its howling could be heard.

After what seemed an eternity, Arceus dipped its head in consent.

_"__Very well. I will let him live. It is to your human system of justice I leave this man. But remember, to do harm or good is his choice, and only his. He cannot blame it on his circumstances."_

_Arceus shot Saturn a sharp glance. _"I strongly advise he choose the latter."_

The lights unfroze. Saturn gasped but they turned just in time and struck the roof around him.

"Thank you," Lily said quietly.

"Fools," Saturn spit out. "And your skewed view of justice!" He held a pokeball in his hand. "Bronzong, Hyper Beam!"

_"__Bronze!"_

WHOOOOSH!

The beam launched straight at Lily.

Lily gasped.

_"__We're dead."_ Shaymin buried its head in Lily's shirt.

_"__No!"_ Arceus stepped in front of the blast. The light shot out to either side, blinding me.

The light faded away. I shielded my eyes. Saturn and Bronzong had disappeared, along with the ship.

"Arceus!" Lily exclaimed. Arceus had dropped down to its knees.

_"__I'm all right."_ Arceus struggled to its feet. _"Is that what you wanted?"_ It asked. _"To let a criminal go free?"_

Lily was silent.

"He's not free." Volkner spoke up. "We'll find him again, and when we do, he'll face the judgment of the law." He slapped Lily on the back. "You did well." He said. "I'm sorry I doubted you."

"Did I?" She asked quietly. "Or did I just let him free only to hurt more people?" Tears swam in her eyes. "What if we could've held him? What if we could'veâ€"?"

"He was too sly," Skit interrupted. "But don't worry. We'll catch up to him. Saturn can't run from the law forever."

"Yeah!" I said. "We'll catch him eventually!"

"Yeah," Volkner echoed; everyone nodded.

_"__Cynda!"_

_ " __Mrrp!"_

_ " __Gallade!"_

_ " __He's going to rue the day he ever set foot in the Valley Windworks!" _Shaymin declared.

We all laughed, even Arceus. As we stood on the roof, wind swirling around us, the storm finally broke. It started with a few raindrops, then it was like someone dumped a bucket on our heads. The rain fell down in sheets. My hair plastered to my head, my clothes sucked up the water. In seconds we were all soaked to the bone.

"Yikes, we need to go!" Lily declared.

"Before we get any wetter!" Skit agreed and pulled out a pokeball. "Razor, retâ€" "

"Oooh! Wait, wait!" I exclaimed, digging in my pockets. I brought out my Pokedex. "Professor Elm would kill me if I forgot to register a pokemon after being around so many!"

"Aw, JT!" Skit groaned. "We're going to get soaked out here!"

"We're already soaked," Volkner pointed out.

I flipped open my Pokedex and pointed it at Gallade.

_"__Gallade, the Blade Pokemon. When trying to protect someone, it extends its elbows as if they were swords and fights savagely."_

"That sounds about right," I said and looked at Skit accusingly. "Why didn't you tell me that you had a Gallade?"

She shrugged. "I guess I forgot what with the poacher and Team Galactic and Byron and Roark and all. Sorry."

_"__Guys, if we stay out here much longer, we'll all get hypothermia!"_

"Shaymin's right," Volkner said. "We need to go."

"Ohâ€"|" Lily turned to Arceus. "I guess this is goodbye, then?"

_"__No, not yet."_ Arceus replied.

* * *

><p>"Whooo! Yah! Whoo-hoo! This is awesome!" Skit hollered.<p>

We were flying on Arceus's back again, and this time Skit had her eyes wide open.

_"__Where would you like me to take you?" _Arceus asked.

"Floaroma Meadow!" Lily yelled above the wind.

_"__As you wish."_

The clouds swooped by below us, a wonder land of moonlight and water droplets. I looked up at the nearly full moon. Its silvery light made it seem like we were flying above a frozen ocean, or a sea of molten metal. Stars glinted above us, twinkling cats eyes that seemed as if I could reach up and pluck one out of the sky.

I let out a whoop of exhilaration.

_"__Well, it's not quite as exciting as flying on my own, but this is still pretty fun!" _Shaymin admitted.

Lily rolled her eyes. "Can you believe we're actually flying above the storm?" She asked.

"It's hard to believe that it's pouring down there!" Volkner hollered back.

Far off a peal of thunder echoed. The air seemed to shake with its reverberations. It was almost like I was standing on the edge of a large drum.

"Do you think we'll be hit by lightning?" The thought struck me.

"Don't worry!" Lily replied. "Arceus will protect us!"

We flew on.

Much too soon, Arceus said, _"We're almost there!"_

We began to descend.

I stretched out my hands as Arceus entered a cloud. The luminescent pearls burst as they hit my skin and traced wet roads along my arms. Then we were through.

It had stopped raining and the moon shone through a break in the clouds. Arceus touched down gently, being sure not to crush any of the white-washed flowers of the meadow. Not far off, the lights of the pokemon center glowed.

I jumped into the wet grass and looked around. It felt like I had stepped out of a dream.

I looked around and noticed Skit. Water droplets hung in her hair and glinted silver in the moonlight. It looked as if someone had dumped a bucket of sparkles on her. She looked at me and giggled. I imagine I looked the same way. So much for the dream!

_"__Cynda!"_

I turned around. Cyndaquill was still on Arceus's back, afraid to jump off into the wet grass. I laughed and held out my arms.

"Here, buddy! Scared of getting wet?"

_"__Quill."_ Cyndaquill landed in my arms. Its fur was plastered down with water. _"Cynda!"_ It shook itself, spraying me with water. _"Cyndaquill."_ It settled into my arms. _Whoosh!_ Went the flame on its back, startling me.

"Careful!" I exclaimed. "You almost made me drop you!"

_"__Cyndaquill!"_

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed Volkner helping Lily off Arceus. "Thank you," She murmured.

Shaymin yawned. _"I'm tired. It's been a full day!"_

"No kidding!" Volkner said. "I think I could sleep for a month!"

Skit yawned too. "Oh yeah? I could sleep for a year!"

I laughed and everyone joined in.

"So, I guess this is goodbye?" Lily asked, turning to Arceus. Arceus nodded.

_"__Already I have been here too long. The slumbering powers are beginning to stir. I fear they sensed the sudden shift in of power. I must leave before they fully awaken!"_

"Aw," I said. "You can't stay?"

_"__I'm afraid not."_

"Wait, won't the land start to die again once the Plates leave?" Skit asked.

_"__No. The land has long-past ceased to need the aid of the Plates. Their absence will not affect the health of the land."_

"Thank you, Arceus, for coming!" Lily sniffed. "Grandfather would be so happy to see his dream come true." She wiped away a tear.

_"__It is I who should be thanking you, Lily." _Arceus leaned forward and looked her in the eye. _"For returning my Plates and showing me that each life is important, and should not be taken lightly."_ Arceus stood straight and gazed at each of us in turn. _"Thank you, each one of you, for the part you played in returning each and every one of my Plates to me."_

Arceus was floating now, right above us. The Plates started to glow, and to spin faster and faster. The glow got so bright that I had to cover my eyes.

_"__Farewell."_

And then—the glow was gone. I opened my eyes. There was nothing there but the clouds and the moon, the field of flowers and my

friends. Arceus had gone.

"Bye Arceus!" Lily yelled suddenly, waving her hands frantically, tears streaming down her face. "Bye! I'll miss you!"

Suddenly, as if Lily had flipped a switch, we all started jumping up and down and yelling goodbye to Arceus.

"Bye!" Volkner called. "Nice knowing you!"

"Goodbye Arceus! Thanks for the ride!" Skit yelled.

_"__Mrow!"_

_ " __Cyndaquill!"_

"Bye!" I waved. "Maybe we'll see you again!" I took my hand down. A thought had just struck me. "Hey?" I asked Skit and Volkner, "Do you think Arceus would've taken us to Hearthome?"

Skit laughed.

"Guess we'll never know," Volkner shrugged, smiling.

"Darn!" I snapped my fingers. "I should've asked!"

_"__Umph," _Shaymin cracked an eye. _"Do you mind keeping it down? You guys could've wakened a herd of deaf Mamoswine!"_

We all laughed.

9. Chapter 9-Ganging Up

Chapter 9

Ganging Up!

"So, what are you going to do now?" Volkner asked, taking a big bite of his sandwich.

"I'm not sure," Lily replied. "I never really had a plan about what I would do after I found all the Plates. I guess I thought I would just be like my Grandfather: searching for the Plates until I was too old."

It was the day after our adventure with Arceus. We had decided to spend the night in the Floaroma Pokemon Center, and leave after having a picnic lunch in the meadow with Lily.

"C'mon," I said; mouth full. "You've got to have some idea about what you want to do!"

"No talking with your mouth full!" Skit elbowed me. I swallowed.

"Why not?" I asked. "Cyndaquill does it!"

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill looked up from its sandwich (that it had stolen from me, I might add). Crumbs littered its face.

"People aren't pokemon." Skit rolled her eyes.

_"__Thank goodness for that!" _Shaymin declared.

"Wellâ€|" Lily continued. "I may go to Canalave City and study legends. I heard they have a large library there."

"Yeah," Volkner nodded, "Canalave Library. It's one of the largest libraries in Sinnoh."

"You'd be good at that," Skit said, picking up a sandwich triangle. "You know, with having first-hand knowledge and all. Don't you think so, Silk?"

_"__Mrrp!"_

_ " __Silk says that she agrees." _Shaymin translated.

"Hey, can you ask Cyndaquill what its favorite flavors are?" I asked.

_"__Of course I can!"_ Shaymin retorted. It turned to Cyndaquill and seemed to be saying something to it telepathically.

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill replied.

_ " __It says spicy and sweet."_

_ " __Quill."_

_ " __Though not together!" _Shaymin hastily added.

"That's exactly what Professor Elm said!" I exclaimed.

"Well," Volkner said, "he is a professor!" We all laughed.

We finished eating and cleaned up. Soon it was time to go.

"Well," Lily said, standing, "I guess we're going opposite directions now, you to Hearthome, me to Canalave. You'll call me or come and visit, right?" She asked.

"Of course," Volkner said.

"We won't forget you!" Skit called over her shoulder as we walked away.

"Bye!" I called.

"Bye!" Lily waved.

"Bye!" Skit and Volkner chorused.

_"__Cyndaquill!"_

_ " __Mrow!"_

_"__See ya!"_ Shaymin called. _"Wait a secondâ€|"hey! You come back here, JT! I never got to pay you back for tripping over me!"_

* * *

><p>A few hours later we were smack-dab in the middle of Eterna Forest. And there wasn't much of a chance of getting out.<p>

"Are we lost?" I asked Volkner, who held the map.

"Wellâ€|I wouldn't say lost, exactlyâ€|"

"Great!" Skit stamped her foot. "First Jubilife, and now this! We're never going to get to Hearthome at this rate!"

"Hey," Volkner frowned. "That was because I was holding the map the wrong way. This is just normal, every-day lost."

"I told you we should've gone right at the fork!" Skit said.

"But the map said left!" Volkner argued.

"You and your stupid maps!" Skit snapped.

"Oh yeah? You think you know better than a trained map-maker?" Volkner snapped back.

"In navigating forests? Yes! We wouldn't be lost right now if you hadn't been trying to follow your map!"

"Well if it wasn't for me and my 'stupid' map, we wouldn't be here right now!"

"Exactly my point!"

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah!"

They glowered at each other, then spun on their heels and crossed their arms, not looking at the other.

"Oh, boy." I plopped down on a stump and looked at Cyndaquill. "How are we gonna get outta this one?"

_"__Cynda,"_ Cyndaquill shrugged.

_"__Mrrrp,"_ Silk trotted over.

"Don't want to get tangled up in it too, huh?" I asked and scratched her between the ears.

"JT!" Skit yelled, still not looking at Volkner. "Tell Volkner that I think we should turn around and go back or I'll just go by myself!"

"Uhâ€|" I paused because Volkner could obviously hear her.

"Well, you can tell her that I said that I think she's acting childish!" Volkner yelled back.

"Um, Volkner saidâ€|" I began hesitantly.

"Oh yeah?" Skit replied. "JT, tell Volkner that since he's obviously not mature enough to read a map, that I'm going!"

"Uh, Skit saidâ€" "

"JT, tell Skit that I don't care! She can wander around forever in these woods if she wants!"

"Tell him that I will!"

"Tell her that'll I see her at the Tradeathon!"

"Tell him that I will see him thereâ€"but I'll be there first!"

"Tell her that there's no way she'll beat me there without a map!"

"Fine!"

"Fine!"

My neck was sore and I felt like an owl from swiveling my head so much trying to follow the conversation.

"Come on, Silk. Let's go!" Skit stalked off and Silk ran to catch up.

"Are you coming with me or Skit, JT?" Volkner asked.

"Uhhâ€" I said, thinking. "Both?" I replied hopefully.

"Uh-uh! I'm not traveling with _him_!" Skit said.

"Come on!" I said, running after her. "Your just going to up and leave after all we've been through together? First Team Galactic in Jubilife, and then Arceus? Just because we're lost?"

"Hmph. Well, I guess you're right." I sighed in relief. "But you can tell Volkner that even though I'm sticking with you, I'm not talking to him!" She yelled. The comment was obviously meant for Volkner.

"Well, you can tell Skit that she can come along for all I care but I'm not talking to her either!" Volkner yelled.

"Well," I said as Skit and Volkner both stomped off in the same direction, not looking at each other, "at least we're still a group. Kinda."

_"__Cyndaquill!"_

"Yeah," I sighed. "This is not gonna be fun."

* * *

><p>We tromped through the forest for a few more hours, still lost, but now Skit and Volkner weren't talking to each other, or even acknowledging each others presence! Whenever one wanted to say

something to the other, they would address it to me (even if they were sitting right next to each other). It was getting tiring and my patience was wearing thin. When would they both stop acting like a couple of babies?

Night fell quickly in Eterna Forest. The large trees blocked out any light from the setting sun and a canopy of darkness spread thick under their leaves. Cyndaquil acted as our flashlight until we came across a clearing where I could see the stars beginning to come out in the navy blue sky.

With a bit of help from Cyndaquil, we built a fire and ate dinner from cans (I prefer Mom's cooking but with Skit and Volkner not talking, I guess half-warmed ravioli was the best I was going to get). They laid out their sleeping bags on opposite sides of the fire and, after a bit debating, I decided to put mine in the middle. Not in the fire, of course, but with my feet towards Skit and my head towards Volkner. I guess we kinda looked like a giant U from the sky.

The fire dwindled and I tossed and turned, brainstorming ideas for getting Skit and Volkner to talk to each other again. I could tell Skit that Volkner wanted to apologize, and tell Volkner the same about Skit but if they talked to each other it would all fall apart. And then they would be mad and not talking to me too! No, there had to be a better way.

I heard a sound in the forest, like a stick breaking underfoot. I sat up and looked around. Nothing. Just some wild pokemon, I told myself, lying back down.

My mind churned.

I could bring Skit flowers and say that Volkner sent them nah, same problem as with my previous idea. It wouldn't stand up under close scrutiny. I could do something with the pokemon, put on some play or something to make them see how silly it was to be fighting.

I sighed. No, that wouldn't work. Man, now I knew how Mom felt whenever my sister and I fought! Of course, Carol and I had been real close, even though she was five years older than me, and Skit and Volkner had known each other for not nearly that long. Of course, after everything we had been through, it felt like much longer.

I remembered a time not that long ago when Carol had stayed and visited for a while and we had argued and stopped talking to each other. Mom and Dad had (somehow) gotten us in the same room and surprised us by jumping out and spraying us with silly-string. After that we had a big silly-string fight and everything had been OK. Maybe I should do that, get Silk and Cyndaquil to help me!

I sighed and flipped over.

But where could I get silly-string in the middle of the forest?

I flipped back to my other side, then to my back, finally settling to lying on my belly.

It was hopeless. I could never get Skit and Volkner to talk to each other! Maybe an idea would present itself in the morning.

I closed my eyes and tried to steady my breathing.

Another crack!

I sat up and glanced around.

There! A shadow!

I leaned forward and peered closer, into the dusky depths of the forest. It was gone.

I rubbed my eyes and lied back down, gazing into the stars. It was just my imagination; I was tired and needed to sleep.

I shivered. Suddenly the forest didn't seem so friendly. I heard cracks, and what sounded almost like whispers on the edge of my hearing. Soft padding like footsteps on damp leaves from last night's storm. Creaking, shifting shadowâ€œ

I ducked my head under my sleeping bag. _Just forest sounds, _I told myself. _There're no monsters out there, nothing dangerous!_

I tried to turn my thoughts to other things.

I thought of Shadow. Why had heâ€œor was it she? I really couldn't tellâ€œsaved us that time we were imprisoned in Team Galactic's ship? Could he be some kind of secret police officer, under cover and trying to sabotage whatever Team Galactic's plan was? But why the mask? Some sort of vigilante pokemon trainer, perhaps? Or a person seeking revenge for some long-past crime inflicted by Team Galactic? And what was that Saturn had said about Shadow messing up their mining operation in Oreburgh? Had Shadow really gotten caught in the blast? Was he even still alive?

The thought chilled me. I had only met Shadow that once, but I felt like I almost knew him. Out of everyone in the cell: Mars-a.k.a. Marley-Jupiter-a.k.a Jessica-Skit, Volkner, Officer Jenny; I was the only one who had actually seen Shadow. And he had talked only to me. Of course, he had only said that one word, Shadow, in his weird, mechanically sounding voice, but still! No one else had seen him (or her. OK, I think I'll just call Shadow a him for now).

These thoughts swirled through my head, and I couldn't fall asleep. I flipped and flopped, twisted and turned. I couldn't seem to get comfortable.

I got worried. What if Skit decided to leave in the middle of the night? Or Volkner? How would I know? And would I ever see them again? I needed to talk to them, tell them how stupid it was for them to be fighting. Heck, everyone got lost once in a while! Skit shouldn't be so mad. And Volkner was an adult for goodness' sake! He shouldn't have acted so childishly. I needed to talk to them, both to them.

That was it!

I sat up when the idea struck me like a blow to the head.

I should talk to them! Try to get them to see the error of their

ways. The worst they could do is split up the team, and at the way things were going now, it could happen anyway.

I made up my mind. I wouldn't wait until morning; I would talk to them _right now_. That is, if they weren't already asleep.

I crawled over to Volkner, passing the glowing embers of the fire, careful not to disturb the slumbering Cyndaquill and Silk. He was facing the forest, back towards me. I reached up and shook his shoulder.

"Volkner?" I whispered close to his ear. "Volkner, are you awake?"

He didn't answer, his eyes were closed.

"Well, I'll try Skit," I whispered to myself.

I crawled over to the other side of the fire where Skit lay, also facing the forest, away from Volkner.

"Skit," I said, shaking her shoulder slightly. "Skit, are you awake? It's me, JT. Yoo-hoo? Anybody there?" I looked at her face. Her eyes were open, if a bit glassy looking. She was definitely breathing. Sleeping with her eyes open, maybe?

"Ski-it?" I waved my hand in front of her eyes, she didn't blink. "Come on, I know you're mad a Volkner, but at least talk to me!"

Nothing. I frowned. Something didn't seem quite right here. Skit almost had a-a panicked expression on her face, not the face of someone who had just happened to fall asleep with their eyes open. My Dad once fell asleep in front of the TV with his eyes half-open and still had that peaceful, sleep face on. Bad dream, perhaps? But then, why wasn't she waking up?

"Skit!" I said, shaking her shoulder harder. "C'mon, wake up!"

No reaction. I frowned again, thought.

She was gazing into the forest, panicked expression on her face—had she seen something? But—

Crack!

My head whipped up. Two eyes stared back at me from the depths of the forest.

"Cyndaquill!" I yelled and stood, stumbled backwards. Cyndaquill didn't stir from its sleep. Or was it asleep?

The eyes took a step forward.

"No! Wait—" I threw up my hand to protect myself. There was a hissing sound. My vision grew dark. I couldn't move. I fell to the ground with a dull _thump._

I stared, unable to do anything, as the blurry shape stepped forward. I remember hearing it say something.

__Vileplume! "__

More shapes emerged from the darkness.

Then nothing.

* * *

><p>I awoke to a strange face hovering over me and a vile taste in my mouth.<p>

"Eew, ech! What is that stuff!" I sat up.

"Swallow, swallow!" The boy who was sitting next to me ordered.
"It'll help you to wake up!"

With great disgust, I managed not to spit out the stuff in my mouth but instead choke it down. I gagged.

"Who-who are you?" I managed to get out.

"I'mâ€" "

"JT!" Suddenly I was enveloped in a hug and my ribs felt like they were about to crack. "You're awake!" Skit exclaimed.

__Cynda! "__

_ "__Mrrp! "__

"Ow, ouch! You're choking me! Stop!"

Skit finally let go and I took a deep breath.

"What on earth happened?" I said, taking stock of my surroundings. We were in a depression of some kind, a natural bowl in the ground. Bushes surrounded it and higher up, trees. Morning sunlight filtered through the leaves. So I had managed to fall asleep after all.

I looked around the clearing. It wasn't all that big. Skit was there, so was Cyndaquill and Silk, and another boy. Brown hair, red jacket partway open to reveal a plain black shirt. Brown pants, sneakers, backpack. Kinda cocky looking. But what really held my attention was not the boy himself, but the pokemon next to him.

__Chimchar! "__

I couldn't help but stare a little. "What happened?" I asked again.
"And what on earth was that foul tasting stuff you made me eat?"

"Worm-root." The boy grinned.

"What?!" I wiped my tongue frantically.

"I'm just joking! It's a mixture of herbs and things my Grandma made. It helps dispel Sleep Powder effects."

"Whew," I sighed. "Wait, Sleep Powder?"

"Yeah," The boy frowned. "You're lucky you didn't get Stun Spore-ed like your girlfriend here and your other friend."

"She's not my girlfriend!" Skit and I yelled at the same time.

"Whatever," The boy shrugged. "How'd you avoid it anyway?"

"Avoid what?" I frowned. "And what's the deal with Sleep Powder and Stun Spore? And where's Volkner?"

"Avoid the Stun Spore! Obviously somehow it didn't work on you or something because the Vileplume used Sleep Powder on you."

"Oh," I frowned, remembering last night. "That must've been when I ducked under my sleeping bag. Wait, Vileplume?!"

"Yeah," Skit leaned forward. "Last night they came and Stun Spore-ed the whole camp! I tried to warn you but it's not like I could really move and then they used Sleeping Powder on you!"

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "So that's why you were staring into the forest! Wait, you remember that?"

Skit nodded. "Unlike Sleep Powder, which makes you go to sleep, Stun Spore just makes it so you can't move; you're still fully aware and all that."

"But-why would the Vileplume just attack like that?" I asked. "And where's Volkner?"

"Volkner'sâ€" Skit started.

Just then I heard a yell and Volkner tumbled into the clearing.

"Hey!" He snapped up at the Vileplume. "I was going! You didn't need to push me!"

"__Vileplume!"_ The Vileplume glared down at us, before disappearing into the bushes beyond our little valley.

"They caught you?" The boy-who-has-yet-to-be-named asked.

"Yeah, it's no use. I hardly got thirty feet before they caught me again. Oh, JT! You're up!" He brightened when he saw me. "I see Jake found the medicine."

"Jake?" I asked.

"Yep, that's me," The boy-who-has-just-been-namedâ€"a.k.a. Jakeâ€"raised his hand. "And you're JT."

We shook hands. "Yep, and this is myâ€" "

"Cyndaquill," Jake nodded. "We already met."

I frowned. "Just how long did it take you to find that medicine?" I imagined him chatting it up with my friends while I lay passed out

and I suddenly felt jealous.

"Well, I had to empty out my whole backpack," He smiled.

"__Chimchar!" _Chimchar leapt onto his shoulder.

"Oh, and this is my Chimchar, FlareBlaze." He added.

"Nice to meet you, FlareBlaze," I said politely. Inside I was whirling with excitement. A Chimchar! I had always wanted one!

Chimchar jumped from Jake's shoulder and landed in front of Cyndaquill. They sniffed noses; then Chimchar suddenly threw leaved all over Cyndaquill and leapt back, laughing.

"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill lunged forward, flames on its back a roaring fire.

"Cyndaquill, be nice," I admonished, scooping up Cyndaquill. "Chimchar was just messing around!"

"__Cynnnnâ€|"_ Cyndaquill glared at Chimchar.

"__Chim-char-ar-ar!" _Chimchar laughed from the safety of Jake's shoulder.

"Aw, it's OK," Jake patted FlareBlaze on its head. "FlareBlaze likes to mess around a bit, it doesn't mean anything."

"Soooâ€|remind me again why the Vileplume kidnapped us?" I asked.

"And are keeping us prisoner." Skit added.

"Well," Volkner settled down more comfortably in the damp leaves. "I think Jake should explain. He's been here longer than us."

"Only since yesterday afternoon," Jake shrugged. "It seemsâ€|" "

FlareBlaze danced from shoulder-to-shoulder around Jake, teasing Cyndaquill.

"Shhhâ€|" I hushed Cyndaquill when it started to growl. "Be nice." I reminded it.

FlareBlaze jumped off Jake's shoulder and ran around the small clearing. Oh! The smooth way it moved, so easily jumping from foot to foot, dodging each obstacle with ease; its bright-orange fur, matching its flaming tail. I had always wanted a Chimchar! It had been the pokemon I had dreamed about (when I wasn't dreaming of owning a super-strong pokemon like Garchomp or Electivire). I knew all its possible moves, what it evolved into, its specific strengths and weaknessesâ€|I had even planned out several battle strategies for when I finally got my Chimchar!

Sighâ€|but when the time finally came for me to pick my pokemon, there were no Chimcharâ€|"the egg had been stolen before ever arriving

at Professor Birch's. I could've waited another month or so, but that would've meant postponing my pokemon journey so instead I made due with Cyndaquill. But don't take that the wrong way! I like Cyndaquill, I really do! It's just not a Chimchar.

I had to jerk myself back to the present to listen to Jake as he explained why we were kidnapped.

"It seems that there are two groups of Vileplume in this forest: the solid-spot Vileplume and the hollow-spot Vileplume. They separate into groups by their spots and, recently, it seems that there has been an increase to the Vileplume meaning both types have to increase their territory into the more-traveled area of Eterna Forest. My guess is that you guys" and I"crossed some sort of boundary line which prompted the hollow-spot Vileplume to kidnap us because we invaded their territory." Jake finished.

"Hollow-spot and solid-spot Vileplume?" I asked.

"Yeah," Jake nodded. "I think they get hollow- or solid- spots depending on what part of the forest they evolved in."

"But don't Vileplume need Leaf Stones to evolve?" I asked. "That would mean a whole lot of Leaf Stones."

"Not exactly," Volkner said, "if there was one big leaf stone than that might account for the number of Vileplume in Eterna Forest."

"Or two!" Skit said excitedly. "If there are two Leaf Stones, one in each of the Vileplume's territory, then that would make since why they evolve differently! Maybe it's not the part of the forest they evolve in, but the Leaf Stone they touch! Maybe the Leaf Stones are just a little different enough to change their spots!"

"Oh, I didn't think of that," Jake said.

"Hmmm"that is a pretty sound hypothesis."

We all stared at Volkner.

"Good guess," He clarified. "But that doesn't change the fact that we're still stuck here."

"Well," I whispered to Cyndaquill, "at least they're talking again. And it only took being kidnapped by a gang of hollow-spot Vileplume to do that."

"Did you say something?" Skit frowned.

"Nope, nothing!" I sat up quickly and coughed into my hand. "Uh, but I still don't understand why the hollow-spot Vileplume would kidnap us."

"Maybe we were in the solid-spot Vileplume's territory, but moved into the hollow-spot Vileplume's territory so they thought we were invading." Jake suggested.

"But they can't go around just kidnapping everybody who gets lost in Eterna Forest!" I protested.

_"__Cynda!"_

"That's why we have to put a stop to it." Volkner said. "Onlyâ€¦" He said kinda sheepishly, "We haven't managed to escape yet."

"Yeah, I tried several times when I first got taken and they caught me each time," Jake said. "And when I tried to battle my way out, they just put me back to sleep."

"Hmmmâ€¦" I mused. "I think I have an idea."

10. Chapter 10-War of the Vileplume

Chapter 10

War of the Vileplume

"Alright, everybody in your places?" I whispered. They all nodded. "Get ready to run!" I turned to Cyndaquill, "Ready, buddy? Now!"

_"__Cyndaaa! Quill!"_

Hssssssssâ€¦

A thick cloud of smoke covered the surrounding forest.

_"__Vileplume?"_

I looked at Volkner, nodded. He sent the signal down to Jake, who passed it on to Skit. At nearly the same time, we burst from our bowl-like prison and fled into the forest. The sudden sound of leaves crunching alerted the Vileplume guarding us to our escape.

_"__Vileplume!"_ It called. _Bonk._

Ouch, I winced. Sounded like Vileplume had run into a tree.

"This way!" Volkner steered right, we followed. Suddenly he braked and dived down.

"Shhh!" He hissed when I nearly tripped over him.

"What is it?" Skit asked as she and Jake came panting up.

"Look, there, in that clearing!" Volkner pointed.

I peeked over the top of the bush. Not very far from our hiding place, were two groups of Vileplume, hollow-spot and solid-spot Vileplume. And they didn't seem happy.

_"__Vile! Vile-plume!"_

_ " __Vile, vile! __Plume, Vileplume!"_

_ " __Plume, plume!"_

_ "__Viiiiileâ€|" _

"Other way," Volkner whispered, and started to crawl out of the bush.

"Wait!" Skit whispered. "Look! Between the Vileplume!"

"What?" I squinted. Then I saw them. The Gloom and Oddish. They were right in the middle of the arguing Vileplume gangs and looked really scared.

"We've got to help them!" Skit exclaimed.

"What are they saying?" Jake asked FlareBlaze.

_ "__Chim! Chimchar, char-ar-ar! Chimchar, chimchar! Chaaar!"
_Chimchar made several complicated motions, including one that looked like it was boxing, and a very good impression of a Gloom.

"Uh, FlareBlaze is saying that the Vileplume are fighting over the Gloom and Oddish, saying that they should join up with their clan and evolve, not the others. But the Gloom and Oddish don't want to evolve yet and are scared that they'll be made to evolve." Jake translated. "Either that, or FlareBlaze is saying it wants a Gloom-sandwich with boxing gloves on it for lunch."

Skit giggled which made Jake smile; I frowned.

"Uh, I think that first one sounds correct," Volkner said.

"What are we going to do?" Skit asked. "We can't just let the Vileplume force the poor Gloom and Oddish into evolving! They should have a choice!"

"Yeah!" I jumped up. "We need to do something!"

"JT, get down!" Volkner hissed. "You're going to be seen!"

"Uh, what?" I turned and met the Vileplume's eyes. Neither the solid-spot, nor the hollow-spot Vileplume looked happy. "Whoops."

"JT!" Skit face-palmed. "Ughh!"

"Uh," I decided to roll with it and stepped from behind the bush, stalking to the Vileplume. "You shouldn't be trying to make the Gloom and Oddish try to evolve!" I addressed the Vileplume. "It's not right! They should be able to make their own choice whether to evolve or not!"

_ "__Pluuumeâ€|" _

_ "__Viiileâ€|" _

They glared at me.

"Um," I said, it 'um' even counts as a word, "and it's not right to kidnap trainers also! This forest doesn't just belong to you!"

_ "___Plume!"_

_ "___Vileplume!"_

_ "___Plume, plume!"_

_ "___Vile! Vileplume!"_

They started to argue with each other again.

"Uh, what are they saying?" I mumbled back to Jake. I daren't turn around incase they attack me from behind.

FlareBlaze made a lot of chattering noises and Jake translated again. "FlareBlaze says that the hollow-spot Vileplume are accusing the solid-spot Vileplume of sending in spies. The solid-spot Vileplume say 'no way! We wouldn't use humans to spy on you!' The hollow-spot Vileplume say 'there are also pokemon! It would be just like you to use trainers' pokemon to spy on us and steal our land!' And now the solid-spot Vileplume are angry at being accused of trying to spy and steal the solid-spot Vileplume's land and the hollow-spot Vileplume are mad because they think the solid-spot Vileplume were spying and they're both mad at the other for trying to get the Gloom and Oddish to join them." Jake stopped, out of breath.

"Okay, now what do we do?" I asked, still not moving.

"Leave and hope they work it out on their own?" Volkner suggested hopefully.

"No way!" Said Skit. "The Gloom and Oddish might get hurt and what if they capture more trainers because they think they're spies?"

"Alright, here goes nothing!" I took a deep breath and stepped forward, shoving the two growling Vileplume leaders apart. "Quit it!" I yelled. "Fighting will get you nowhere! How about you just share the forest nice and peacefully? You're both Vileplume, even if your spots may look just a little bit different!"

They both stumbled back and stared at me. Then they growled, but not at each other.

"Uh-oh," I said.

"JT, look out! They're going to use Stun Spore on you!" Skit yelled.

My feet were rooted to the ground. I couldn't move.

_ "___Cyndaaaa-Quill!"_

_ "___Chimchar!"_

Cyndaquill and FlareBlaze came to my rescue, tackling the Vileplume and sending them flying!

"Good job, FlareBlaze!" Jake jumped out from behind the

bush.

"Thanks, Cyndaquill!" I said as Volkner and Skit also emerged from behind the bush.

"Can't you just stop fighting?" Skit yelled at them. "Can't you just do what JT said and share the forest?"

_"__Grrrrrâ€|" _Both groups of Vileplume turned to us.

_"__Oddishâ€|" _

_ " __Gloomâ€|" _

The Oddish and Gloom trembled in fright.

"Uh-oh," I said.

"Nothing unites two fighting people like a common enemy," Volkner murmured.

"Run!" Skit yelled. Too late.

_"__Vileplume!"_ They launched themselves at us.

Whirrrrr-whoop!

A net came out of nowhere and scooped all the Vileplume, Gloom, and Oddish up!

"No!" Skit exclaimed.

"Yes," A grinning man stepped from behind a tree, Houndoom at his heels, holding a bazooka-like device.

Skit and I gasped and said at the same time: "Honey Poacher!"

The man frowned. "The name's Gorton Orkney an' you remember that!"

"What are you doing?" Jake exclaimed.

"What does it look like I'm doing? Capturing these lovely Vileplume!"

The pokemon struggled in the net.

"You're not capturing them!" Skit yelled. "You're stealing them!"

"Eh, close enough," He shrugged. "Now, to make sure you don't mess up my plans againâ€|" He shot another net from his bazooka which fell over us.

"No, you can't do this!" I yelled. "Cyndaquill, Ember!"

_"__Cynda!"_

_Whoosh! _The flame did nothing.

"Ha-ha-ha! That net is fire-proof! And claw-proof, and any other kind of proof!" He laughed. "See ya! Houndoom, grab the net."

_"__Hound!" _Houndoom grabbed the net in its teeth and began to drag it.

_"__Oddish, odd!"_

_ " __Gloom!"_

_ " __Vileplume!"_

"You won't get away with this!" Jake yelled.

"I already have!" Gorton Orkney laughed again and then the trees hid him from sight.

"Not if I have anything to say about it!" Jake started to struggle.

"Ow!" I said as he kicked me in the shin.

"It's no use!" Volkner told him. "The net's weighted! We won't be able get it off us!"

"Then it's hopeless," Jake said, deflated.

"Hmmm!" I mused. "Maybe not. Does your Chimchar know dig?" I asked.

"Uh, sure, but why?" I saw it on his face when he realized my plan. "Of course! FlareBlaze, dig!"

_"__Chimchar!"_ FlareBlaze burrowed under the net and came up on the other side.

"Can we fit?" I asked.

"Uh, I think so," Volkner said, sticking his head in the hole. "If we crawl. You guys go first."

One by one we crawled out from under the net. The pokemon had the easiest time of it—we needed everybody's help to pull Volkner out of the hole.

"Ow! My shoulder!" He rubbed it. "Couldn't you have pulled a bit softer?" He asked.

"Sorry," Skit shrugged. "But we needed to get you unstuck."

Volkner sighed.

"Come on, guys!" I said. "Let's go save the pokemon!"

It wasn't too hard to find Gorton Orkney because we weren't lugging around a bag full of pokemon. We caught up to him just as he was about to put the Vileplume in a cage behind his memorable truck.

"Shhh!" Volkner crouched. "We want to wait for the right moment to attack." He whispered.

We hid behind some bushes and watched.

"Come on, Houndoom, can't you drag that bag faster? We need to get outta here before those kids get free." The poacher walked up to the cage and banged on the bars as the Vileplume inside got too close to the door. "Back! Back I say!"

"Wait, what are those Vileplume doing in the cage?" Skit asked. "I thought all the Vileplume were in the bag?"

"Those are the misfit Vileplume," Jake explained in a whisper. "The ones that don't hang around with the gangs."

"But why?" I asked back.

"Look at their spots."

I peered closer. At first I didn't notice anything. I was looking at a Vileplume that had solid spots on its petals, but then it turned and I noticed

"They have solid and hollow spots on their petals!" I exclaimed in a whisper.

Jake nodded. "Neither of the Vileplume groups trusts them, so they loners."

"How sad," Skit remarked. "To be left out just because you're different."

"Well," I said, "at least they don't have to fight."

"Like we do," Volkner cut in. "We need to think of a plan so that the Vileplume don't get hurt."

"Yeah," Jake agreed. "If we go in there guns all a blazin' we might accidentally hurt one of the pokemon."

"How about," Skit snapped her fingers, "how about we kill two birds with one stone?"

"Huh?" I asked.

"How?" Volkner said at the same time.

Skit was practically hopping up and down in excitement. "We sneak over there and convince the Vileplume that they need to work together to get out? That way they'll stop fighting, and be free!"

"Hmmm!" Volkner frowned. "It's risky."

"Please?" Skit begged. "It's worth a try!"

"I agree with Skit!" Jake said. "And if it doesn't work, we free them ourselves!"

"Fine," Volkner nodded. "We'll try."

"Alright, in you go!" Gorton Orkney said. "Hop on in there like good little pokemon."

Houndoom was growling at the Vileplume, Gloom, and Oddish who had been freed from the net. One Oddish didn't jump immediately into the cage like it was told.

"I said get in there!" The Poacher yelled harshly. "Get in there or get fried!"

_"__Grrrrrâ€|"_"

_ " __Oddish!" _The shivering creature jumped quickly in with its companions.

"C'mon!"

Creeping along the trees and staying low, Volkner led the way to the truck. Once there, we flattened ourselves to the ground.

_"__Vile?"_ One of the Vileplume spotted us.

"Shhhâ€|" Volkner put his finger to his lips. "We're here to help youâ€|" He started.

"But you need to convince the other Vileplume to work together to get out!" Skit finished.

_"__Vileplume!" _The Vileplume turned to its neighbors as another Gloom hopped into the cage.

_"__Vileplume!"_

_ " __Plume, plume!"_

_ " __Vileplume, vile!"_

_ " __Plume, Vileplume!"_

The Vileplume seemed to be arguing.

"Well, that's the last of them!" Gorton Orkney said as the last Vileplume hopped into the cage. He closed and locked it with a bang and walked to the front of his car. "A good day's haul, that was."

"Oh, no! He's leaving!" Skit whispered, horrified.

"No he's not," Volkner appeared. I hadn't even noticed he had left! "I fixed it so that he's getting nowhere fast. But if the Vileplume don't start to work together soon, we're going to have to free them ourselves."

"Okay," Skit said, downcast.

_"__Vile, vile!"_

_ "__Plume! Vileplume!"_

The cage started shaking as the Vileplume began to fight.

_ "__Gloom, gloom!"_

_ "__Oddish, odd!"_

_ "__Vileâ€¦!"_

All the pokemon that didn't fight hunched near the back of the cage.

"No, you've got to work together!" Skit exclaimed. "Don't fight each other, fight the cage!"

"Why won't this darn car start?!" The poacher suddenly yelled, jumping out of his seat and slamming the door. He walked around the side. "You, pokemon, stop this racket right now or I'llâ€¦" "You?!" He yelled when he saw us. "How'd you get out so fast?!"

"Quick, free the Vileplume!" Volkner said, leaping up.

"Oh, no you don't! Houndoom, Flamethrower!"

_ "__Hound!"_

_ Whooosh!_

"Cyndaquill, Tackle!" I yelled.

_ "__Cynda!"_

"Crunch, Houndoom!"

_ "__Quiiiiiiill!"_

"Cyndaquill!" I yelled.

"FlareBlaze, Scratch!"

_ "__Chimchar!"_ FlareBlaze came to Cyndaquill's aid just in time.

_ "__Dooom!"_ Houndoom howled.

"Cyndaquill!" I scooped Cyndaquill into my arms. "You okay?"

_ "__Cynda?"_ It opened an eye.

"Good," I smiled.

"JT, help me!" Skit yelled from the direction of the cage. "It's locked!"

I ran over and together we tugged at the door. It didn't budge.

"Oh, no!" I gasped. "We're too late!"

"No we're not!" Skit said. "If we can just get the Vileplume to work togetherâ€" She knelt down and stared through the bars of the cage. "Listen to me. You have to stop fighting and work as a team to get out of here, got it?"

_ "__Vile!" _

_ "__Vileplume!" _

The leader of the solid-spot clan and the leader of the hollow-spot clan turned away from each other and crossed their arms.

"Please!" Skit begged.

"They're not going to do it," I said grimly. I knelt down too. "Listen, Oddish, Gloom, solid- and hollow- spot Vileplume, it's up to you now. You're friends are too busy fighting each other to try and break out of the cage so it's up to you to free yourselves and them. Now go for it!"

_ "__Gloom!" _

_ "__Oddish!" _

_ "__Vileplume!" _

All the Gloom and Oddish stepped forward and sprayed a purple-y substance on the bars. They started to hiss.

"Acid attack," Skit whispered.

_ "__Viillle!" _The flowers of the Vileplume that had both kinds of spots started to glow.

"Step back!" Skit warned. "They're about to use Solar Beam!"

We stepped out of the way and a strong burst of light which made me shield my eyes hit the weakened part of the cage. I opened my eyes. The cage was still intact.

"We need more power!" Skit said. "Please work together?" She begged the fighting Vileplume. They wouldn't even look at each other.

"Houndoom, Flamethrower!"

"Jolteon, dodge!"

_ "__Joltâ€"jooooolt!" _

"No, Jolteon!"

"FlareBlaze, use Dig!"

"Houndoom, Crunch!"

_ "__Chimchaaaaar!" _

"FlareBlaze!"

"They're losing!" I stood up. "I've got to help them!"

Skit nodded. "I'll try to convince the Vileplume that they need to work together."

I nodded. "Alright, Sucker! Go!"

_"__Zuuu!"_

Mr. Honey Poacher smirked. "Is that Sucker as in lollipop, or Sucker as in loser?" He asked.

"Neither!" I yelled. "Sucker, Leech Life!"

_"__Zubat!"_

"Counter with Flamethrower!"

_"__Hound!"_

"Dodge!" I yelled.

_"__Zu!"_

The Flamethrower attack came right at Sucker and I thought for sure it was going to hit, but at the last moment Sucker buoyed up and the attack missed!

"What?!" Mr. Honey Poacher screamed.

"Leech Life!" I yelled.

_"__Zubat!"_

Sucker latched onto Houndoom and began to drain its energy.

"Shake it off!" He yelled.

_"__Houndoom! Hound-hound!"_

Finally, Sucker was flung off.

"Good job, Sucker!" I yelled encouragement.
"Supersonic!"

"Dodge!"

Screeeeeeee!

_ " __Doom!"_ Houndoom narrowly avoided the attack.

"I'm getting' tired o' this!" Gorton Orkney hollered. "Houndoom, Fire Blast!"

_"__Houndoom!"_

"Dodge!" I yelled. But Houndoom wasn't aiming at Sucker. It was aimed at Volkner, Jake, and me.

FWOOOOOM!

"Aaaahhhh!"

The blast hit. I flew backwards, vaguely aware that Skit, Volkner, Jake, FlareBlaze, and Sucker were also knocked back by the blast. I hit the ground.

"Humph, somebody had to teach ya a lesson," Gorton Orkney's voice said through the fog that threatened to overwhelm me. "That'll teach ya to mess wi' Gorton Orkney! C'mon, Houndoom, we got us some pokemon to take."

11. Chapter 11-Best Friend

Chapter 11

Best Friend

"Youâ€"can't'!" I said weakly, trying to push myself up. "Suckerâ€"|" I trailed off.

_ "__Cynda?"_

A nose nudged me.

"Cyndaquill?" I asked.

_ "__Quill!"_

"You want to fight to defend the pokemon?" I pushed myself to my feet and stood shakily. "Then I will too!" I said my voice stronger.

Gorton Orkney turned around, puzzled. "You're up? Eh, just stay outta my way!"

"No!" I said. "I won't let you take these pokemon! As long as my pokemon can fight, I will too! And we're not giving up until we defeat you!"

_ "__Cyndaquill!"_

The poacher looked at Cyndaquill. "Sprightly little fellow," He grinned. "But that ain't gonna help you beat my Houndoom! Crunch!"

_ "__Houndoom!"_

Houndoom launched itself at Cyndaquill. I gritted my teeth, tried to think. How could my tiny, hurt Cyndaquill defeat Gorton's large Houndoom? Then it hit me.

"Run at it!" I yelled to Cyndaquill. "Just like in Oreburgh!"

_ "__Cynda!" _Cyndaquill nodded and took off.

"Huh, trying to beat me in a head-on attack, are ya?" He grinned.

"I'm 'fraid that won't work! And this time you don't have any friends to help you!"

I glanced back at Volkner, Skit, Jake, Silk, FlareBlaze, Jolteon, and Sucker. They all lay on the ground, unconscious or groaning. This battle was up to me.

"Now!" I yelled at Cyndaquill.

Like a baseball player sliding into home base (or my Dad that first time we went ice-skating) Cyndaquill slipped under Houndoom and came up on the other side.

"Tackle!" I ordered.

Before Houndoom could turn, Cyndaquill Tackled it from the side.

"Grrrrrrâ€|Houndoom, Flamethrower!"

"Dodge!" I yelled and Cyndaquill jumped out of the way.

_"__Gloom! Gloom-gloom!"_

_ " __Oddish, odd!"_

_ " __Vileplume!"_

The pokemon cheered for me from their cage. I smiled. It seemed I had an audience.

More confident, I said, "Cyndaquill, Tackle again!"

_"__Cynda!"_

_ " __Dooooom!"_

"Doomy!" Gorton yelled as my attack hit. The pokemon cheered. "Hey, you! Shut-up!" He ordered.

"Quick!" I said. "Use this time to escape!"

_"__Vileplume?"_

_ " __Vileplume?"_

"You can do it!" I encouraged. "You can work together to get out!"

_"__Vileplume."_

I risked a glance away from the battle to see the Vileplume nodding at each other. Then all their flowers began to glow.

"Houndoom, Flamethrower at the Vileplume! Show them who's boss!" Gorton grinned evilly.

_"__Houndoom!"_

"Oh, no!" I whispered. I couldn't let that happen! "Cyndaquill!" I

yelled.

_"__Cynda!" _Cyndaquill took a flying leap.

"Now!"

_"__Doom!"_

"Now!"

_"__Quiiiiilll!"_

FWOOOOSH!

The flames flew from Houndoom's gaping mouth. Right at the cage, right atâ€"Cyndaquill.

_"__Cyyynnn!"_

"Hold on, buddy!"

"More power, Houndoom!"

_"__Quiiiiilll!" _

The flames pushed Cyndaquill back, but it held on.

"You can do it!" I yelled.

_"__VILEPLUME!"_

As one, the Vileplume released their Solar Beams.

WHOOOOSH!

"NOOOOO!" Gorton Orkney yelled as the cage dissolved into a million pieces of sparkling light. The Vileplume, Gloom, and Oddish were free.

"Run!" I yelled. "Quick! While Cyndaquill and I are holding him off!"

_"__Vile?" _The two head-Vileplume from the solid-spot clan and the hollow-spot clan looked at each other. I thought they were going to start fighting again, but instead they nodded at each other, once.

_"__Vileplume!" _As one, they turned to the poacher. _"Viiile!"_ Petals started to swirl around them.

"Uh-oh, Houndoom!"

Houndoom stopped its Flamethrower attack.

_"__Doom?"_

"Cyndaquill, are you alright?" I asked.

_"__Cynda!"_ Cyndaquill said, despite the fact that it had just received a powerful attack.

"Awesome. You ready guys?" I asked the Vileplume. "Attack now! Cyndaquill, use Ember on the Petal Dance attack!"

_"__Vileplume!"_

_ " __Cyndaquill!"_

The Vileplume released their attack; the swirling petals flew at Houndoom and Gorton. Then Cyndaquill used Ember, catching the petals on fire.

"Runnnnn!" Gorton Orkney yelled.

_"__Doooom!"_ Houndoom howled.

The flaming Petal Dance hit them.

"Ow, ow, ow!" The poacher ran off through the woods, pants on fire.

_"__Hound, hound, hound!"_ Houndoom followed, its flaming tail waving madly behind it as they disappeared into the trees.

"Yes!" I pumped my fist. "Good job, guys! We beat him!"

_"__Vileplume!"_ The Vileplume chorused; the rest of the pokemon joined in.

_"__Cyndaaâ€¦!"_ Cyndaquill suddenly collapsed, its energy all used up.

"Cyndaquill!" I exclaimed. I scooped it up in my arms. "Good job, buddy." I smiled. "You were awesome."

"Are the Vileplume safe?"

I turned and saw Skit sitting up, rubbing her head and looking a little worse for wear.

"Wow that was awesome, JT!" Jake looked pretty much okay, if a bit banged up.

"What happened?" Volkner asked.

A grin split my face, I was glad to see that my friends were all okay.

"The Vileplume are fine," I said to Skit. "They even worked together to help me beat the poacher!"

Skit beamed. "Really? Yay! Maybe they'll learn to be friends after all!"

_"__Vileplume!"_

_ "__Plume, Vile!"_

"Orâ€|not," Volkner said.

_ "__Vile, vile!"_

_ "__Vileplume, plume!"_

"What?" I slumped at the sight of the Vileplume arguing again. "But you guys just worked together a minute ago!"

"I guess a Vileplume never changes its spots," Jake said.

_ "__Chimchar!"_

"Yeah, I guess some people and pokemon never change." Skit said sadly.

"Wait, what are those other pokemon doing?" Volkner asked.

The hollow-spotted Vileplume had grouped backed together and stood facing the solid-spot Vileplume, back to the way they had been before Gorton Orkney showed up. But then all the Oddish, Gloom, and Vileplume that had a mix of the two spots stepped between them!

_ "__Gloom, gloom!"_

_ "__Vileplume!"_

_ "__Oddish! Odd, Oddish!"_

_ "__Vile, Vileplume!"_

_ "__Plume, vile, vile!"_

They seemed to be arguing.

"What are they saying?" I asked Jake.

FlareBlaze jumped off his shoulder and Jake began to translate.

"Uh, FlareBlaze says thatâ€|um," A puzzled look came over Jake's face. "They want pastrami pizza for dinner?"

_ "__Chimchar!" _Chimchar tried again.

"Oh!" Jake exclaimed. "It seems that the Gloom, Oddish, and the double-spotted Vileplume are trying to get the hollow- and solid-spot Vileplume to be friends!"

_ "__Vileplume!"_

_ "__Oddish, odd!"_

_ "__Gloom, gloom!"_

_ "__Vile!"_

_ "__Plume," _The hollow-spot Vileplume leader was stubborn.

"The hollow-spot Vileplume says that there's no way they'll be friends with the low-down solid-spot Vileplume."

_ "__Vile!" _The solid-spot Vileplume leader crossed its arms and turned away from the pleading Gloom.

"And the solid-spot Vileplume say they don't want to be friends with the hollow-spot Vileplume!"

_ "__Glooooo!"_

_ "__Oddish, odd!"_

"The Gloom and Oddish are saying 'what? After working together to free yourselves, you still won't be friends?!'"

_ "__Vileplume."_

"The solid-spot Vileplume leader says there can be no friendship between them and the hollow-spot Vileplume."

_ "__Vile, vile."_

"Andâ€¦" Jake said slowly. "The hollow-spot Vileplume leader says he agrees."

"Why?" Skit wailed. "Why can't they just be friends?"

"Yeah," I said. "Why don't they just make one big clan?"

A Gloom walked over. _"Gloom,"_ It said sadly. _"Gloom, Gloom. Glooo, gloom-gloom."_

_ "__Chimchar! Chim-chim! Chaaar!"_

"The Gloom says there used to be one clan," Jake translated, "but then there was an accident, and the clans split depending on their spot, leaving the double-spotted Vileplume as outcasts."

"What accident?" Skit asked.

_ "__Chimchar?"_

_ "__Gloom. Gloo, gloom."_

_ "__Chimchar, chim!"_

"There was a flood," Jake said slowly, "and the head solid-spot Vileplume and the head hollow-spot Vileplume were trapped on a rock. Then the hollow-spot Vileplume pushed the solid-spot Vileplume off."

Skit gasped. "How awful!"

_ "__Gloom, Gloom!"_

"Wait, no, it says the solid-spot Vileplume pushed the hollow-spot

Vileplume off," Jake said, puzzled.

_"__Gloo, gloo-Gloom!"_

"Uhhâ€|each says the other pushed it off?" Jake questioned.

"So, who pushed who off?" Volkner asked.

_"__Vile!"_

_ "__Vile!"_

Each of the leader-Vileplume pointed to the other.

"Hmmmâ€|" Skit came and knelt in front of the two arguing Vileplume.
"How about you explain to me what happened?"

_"__Vileplume, vile!"_

_ "__Vile, vile!"_

_ "__Vileplume!"_

_ "__Plume!"_

Skit held up her hand for them to stop. "Wait, one at a time. You first." She pointed to the solid-spot Vileplume.

_"__Vileplume, plume. Plume, plume! Vile-Pluuuuume!"_

"Vileplume says it was just minding its own business, standing on the rock when suddenly the other Vileplume pushed it off!" Jake said.

_"__Vileplume," _Vileplume nodded in assent.

_"__Vileplume, plume!" _Hollow-spot Vileplume leaned into the solid-spot Vileplume's face.

"Uh, the other Vileplume says that's not what happened."

_"__Vile, Vileplume. Plume, vile, vile! __Viiii!"_

"The hollow-spot Vileplume says that it was standing on the rock when it slipped. It reached out a hand-er-paw to steady itself on the solid-spot Vileplume but instead of helping it, the solid-spot Vileplume pushed it off."

_"__Vileplume, vile!"_ The solid-spot Vileplume said.

"Uh, it says 'that's not what happened!'"

_"__Plume, plume! Vileplume!"_ Replied the hollow-spot Vileplume.

"Um, I think it said 'yes it is! Why don't you just fess up and apologize?'"

_"__Plu! Vileplume!"_

"'Because I'm not going to apologize for something you did!'"

_"__Viiiiiii!"_

"'How dare you suggest that I did it!'"

"Stop!" Skit yelled. "I think I know what happened, but you have to stay quiet long enough to listen!"

The Vileplume stopped yelling at each other and were quiet.

"Good. Alright, I think what happened is thisâ€"there was a flood. Both of you were stranded on a rock. Mr. Hollow-spot Vileplume slipped and reached out to steady itself on Mr. Solid-spot Vileplume, but Mr. Solid-spot Vileplume was knocked off balance and flung his arms back to try and keep his balance and wound up knocking Mr. Hollow-spot Vileplume off the rock. At the same time that Mr. Hollow-spot Vileplume fell off one side of the rock, Mr. Solid-spot Vileplume fell off the other because it had been knocked off balance by Mr. Hollow-spot Vileplume as he was trying to keep his balance. Somehow, you both survived, but because you thought the other Vileplume had pushed you off, you got mad and formed your own clan, group, gang, whatever. You chose the part of the forest with the Leaf Stone that made you evolve because you felt most at home there and that's why you wound up in groups of how your spots looked. But each of you felt like there were more Vileplume in the other gang and you had to protect yourself from them so you made Gloom evolve into whatever spotted Vileplume type your clan was. Because of this, each of you soon overgrew your borders and had to extend them into the more traveled part of the forest. But the larger your territories got, the more they overlapped and the more you fought. Finally, the hollow-spotted Vileplume thought that the solid-spotted Vileplume had sent spiedâ€"usâ€"into their part of the forest to try once and for all to take over the whole forest, so they captured us. And here we are now. Is that how it happened?"

_"__Vile."_

_ " __Plume." _

The two Vileplume crossed their arms and looked away.

"Uh," Jake said, watching Chimchar do its translating dance. "FlareBlaze says that they say that you couldn't be any farther from the truth."

"Awwwâ€|" Skit slumped. "I was so sureâ€|!"

_"__Vileplume." _One of the double-spotted Vileplume separated from the group and walked forward.

_"__Chimchar, chim-chim!"_

"Wait, maybe they're wrong." Jake said. "This Vileplume says that's exactly what happened."

_"__Plume. Vile-vile."_

"It says it saw the whole thing!"

__"__Vileplume, vile. Vile-vile! Pluuuume! __Vileplume, Vileplume. Plume."__

FlareBlaze and Jake translated. "'It happened just like the girl said. The hollow-spotted Vileplume slipped and grabbed on to the solid-spotted Vileplume. But the solid-spotted Vileplume almost fell off; he threw out his hands to catch his balance, but he fell anyway. Because the solid-spotted Vileplume had thrown out his hands, he had accidentally pushed the hollow-spotted Vileplume off the rock. The hollow-spotted Vileplume managed to grab onto a fallen tree and climb onto solid ground while the solid-spotted Vileplume was rescued by other solid-spotted Vileplume. I saw the whole thing, but because they soon split up the clan, all the double-spotted Vileplume became outcasts! Though I tried to tell both of them, the leaders, I never got passed the Vileplume who were guarding the borders because they thought I might be a spy. Now that they know, I hope we can once again be one clan and live together in peace.'"

"Wow," I said. "What a story."

__"__Cynda!"__

"Oh!" I looked down in surprise at Cyndaquill who lay in my arms. "You're awake! Feelin' better?"

__"__Quill!"__

"Focus, JT." Volkner said. "We're kinda on to something here."

"Did you hear that, Mr. Head-Vileplume?" Skit asked. "Neither of you meant to push the other off the rock, it was just an accident!"

__"__Plume."__

__ "__Plume."__

They didn't look at each other.

"Oh, come on!" Skit threw her hands up in exasperation. "Just apologize, for goodness' sake and move on! Your decisions to break up the clan into spot-type has hurt not just you, but the double-spotted Vileplume, the Gloom, and all the Oddish too! Do any of you actually want to be in separate clans, fighting all the time?" Skit turned to the other hollow-spot Vileplume and solid-spot Vileplume. They glanced at the others in their clan, then shook their heads.

__"__Vile, Vileplume." __A hollow-spot Vileplume said.

__"__Plume." __Said a solid-spot Vileplume.

__"__Char! Cha-cha-char! Chimchar!"__

"FlareBlaze says that both the Vileplume types only split up because they were following their leadersâ€”they never really wanted to do it."

"Then you don't have to." Skit said firmly. "You can make yourselves

one clan again. Pick new leadersâ€”one from both the solid-spot and hollow-spot Vileplume."

_"__Plume, plume!" _The double-spotted Vileplume said.

"It says that that's how it used to beâ€”there would be one Vileplume representing the hollow-spots and one representing the solid-spots and then there would be a double-spotted leader so that no group felt left out."

_"__Vileplume! Plume, vileâ€”Vileplume."_

"Except when these two Vileplumeâ€”who were the second in commandâ€”split the clan, the double-spotted Vileplume leader was so sad it left!" Jake said.

"Then how about you become the new leader?" I asked the double-spotted Vileplume that had seen what really happened.

_"__Plume?"_

"Yeah!" Skit encouraged. "You don't need those two trouble-making Vileplume, you can make a new clan without them and be leader!"

_"__Vile?"_

_ " __Vile?"_

_ " __Vile?" _

All the double- and hollow- and solid-spot Vileplume looked at each other.

"I know!" Volkner said. "Let's put it to a vote! You, Leader Double-Spot we'll call you, come stand over here. Anyone who wants to make a new clan with solid- and hollow- and double-spot Vileplume all living in peace, come over here!"

_"__Oddish, Oddish, Oddish, Oddish!"_

_ " __Gloom, Gloom, Gloom, Gloom!"_

All the Oddish and Gloom immediately went to Leader Double-Spot and gathered around him. They were closely followed by all the other double-spotted Vileplume. Then, one by one, the solid- and hollow-spot Vileplume began to trickle over to him also.

_"__Vile?!"_

_ " __Vile?!"_

Both of the former-leader Vileplume exclaimed.

_"__Vile, vile, vile!"_

_ " __Vileplume! Vile-Plume!"_

They exclaimed after the deserting pokemon. It seemed like they were trying to convince them to stay. But they didn't. By the time the last Vileplume trickled over to Leader Double-Spot, not one pokemon was left over by the two Vileplume. Well, maybe one.

_"__Oddish? Odd?"_ The tiny Oddish looked around it in confusion.
"Odd-odd-odd!" It jogged over to Leader Double-Spot's group.

Volkner chuckled. "I think it's unanimous. Leader Double-Spot won! There will be a new, united Vileplumeâ€”and Oddish and Gloomâ€”clan!"

_"__Vileplume! Plume!"_

_ " __Vile, vile!"_

The two Vileplume started arguing with each otherâ€”again.

_"__Vileplume. Vile, vile."_ Leader Double-Spot stepped forward and addressed the two renegade Vileplume.

_"__Chim-chim!"_

"It says 'you are hereby banished from the clan. If you wish to return, you will have to apologize to each other, and to the whole clan for the wrong you have done to them, and you have to promise never to stir up strife in the clan againâ€”about the shape of one's spots, or other. Now leave!'"

_"__Vileplumeâ€”!"_

_ " __Viiiiiiâ€”!"_

The two Vileplume hissed and slinked off into the woods.

_"__Vileplume! Vile, Vileplume!"_ Leader Double-Spot addressed his new clan.

"'No more are we separate clans! Today, we are one!'"

All the pokemon cheeredâ€”people too.

"But," Skit said, "don't you think banishment is kind of a harsh punishment?"

"Not at all," Volkner replied. "They had a chance to returnâ€”they just chose not to. If Leader Double-Spot just let them have their old positions, they might've stirred up troubleâ€”splitting the clans again."

"Yeah, I see what you mean." Skit nodded.

_"__Vileplume, plume."_ Leader Double-Spot walked forward. _"__Vile, vile. Plume."_

_ " __Char! Chimchar! __Chim-chim, char-ar-ar!"_

"Leader Double-Spot says," Jake translated, "'I thank you for helping us to reunite our clans. I'm sorry that you were kidnappedâ€"don't worry, it'll never happen again."

"It better," Volkner joked. "We barely got out the first time!"

Everyoneâ€"people and pokemonâ€"laughed.

* * *

><p>With a bit of help from our new Vileplume friends, we managed to get out of Eterna Forest just as the sun was setting.<p>

"Next stopâ€"Eterna City!" Volkner exclaimed.

"Then soon we'll be in Hearthome!" I pumped my fist in the air.

_"__Cynda!_"_

"Are you going to the Tradeathon?" Skit asked Jake.

"Nah," He said. "It sounds cool and all, but I've got to head up to Snowpoint City."

"For what?" I asked.

Jake blushed and twirled his toes in the dirt. "To help my mom do stuff." He mumbled.

I had to smother a laugh, and I could tell Skit was working hard not to grin.

"Speaking of which, JT," Jake said casually. "Did you name your Zubat Sucker as in the lollipop, or Sucker as in loser?"

It was my turn to go red. I opened my mouth to retort when Volkner slapped me on the back.

"He got you there, didn't he?" Volkner laughed. I rolled my eyes.

"Well," Jake stopped walking. "I guess this is bye."

"Why?" I asked. "Doesn't the road to Snowpoint split off near Mt. Coronet?"

"This way's faster," Jake said, pointing down a different path than the one we were taking.

"Oh, well, bye then." Skit said, and started walking down the road to Eterna City. "See ya!" She waved.

"Bye!" Volkner echoed. "Nice meeting you!"

"Yeah! Maybe I'll see you later some time! Bye!" Jake waved.

I scratched FlareBlaze on the head. "Bye, FlareBlaze." I said, sad to have to say goodbye. "Bye, Jake!" I turned to follow Skit and

Volkner.

"JT, wait!" Jake said before I could go. "In that battle with the poacherâ€"that was awesome. Cyndaquill was awesome."

"Uh, thanks," I said. "I think it's so cool that FlareBlaze can translate other pokemon."

"Yeah," Jake said, "but not as cool as Cyndaquill was in that battle. FlareBlaze and I could never have beaten him like that. And, since I'm not going to the Tradeathon and you areâ€"would you trade your Cyndaquill for FlareBlaze?"

"Uhhhâ€|" I was stunned.

"Please? That was so totally awesome how Cyndaquill slipped under Houndoom's legs like that! And how it withstood such a powerful Flamethrower! I know, with a bit of work, you can make FlareBlaze battle like that! Please?" He asked again.

"Wellâ€|" My first thought was to say yes, to jump at the offer and walk away with a Chimchar. But I hesitated. Because to have a Chimcharâ€"I would have to give away Cyndaquill.

I remembered all those years I would play with the pokemon at Professor Rowan's. It was at an early age that I realized that I wanted Chimchar to be my first pokemon and I spent most of my time playing with all the Chimchar. But each year, as new trainers reached the age where they could get a pokemon, I had to watch as the Chimchar were led away, to be friends with someone elseâ€"not me. I was determined that the first pokemon I would get would be a Chimchar, and I wouldn't have to watch as someone else made friends with it and make it into an awesome pokemon.

Chris and Danica were always skipping around on the pokemon they wantedâ€"first a Piplup, then a Turtwig, and then a Chimchar, then back to Piplup. But I always knewâ€"I _knew! _That I wanted a Chimchar. I learned all its moves, studied Chimchar and Infernape battle strategies, made my _own_ battle strategies! I knew that Chimchar's tail-flame went out while it slept, that they were incredibly playful, I knew everything about Chimchar!

But thenâ€"but when it was finally my turn to pick a pokemon, to claim a Chimchar as mineâ€"I couldn't. The Chimchar egg had been stolen, and to choose to wait for a Chimchar would've meant a delay in my pokemon journey during which Chris and Danica would've gotten ahead of me. And I didn't want that to happen.

So I picked Cyndaquill.

Cyndaquill whose stats I didn't know anything about, Cyndaquill whose moves were a mystery to me, Cyndaquill who ate _trash_ and liked it! Cyndaquill which was a _Johto_ starter pokemon!

But I had chosen not to wait.

And I found myself liking Cyndaquill more and more as we journeyed together. We had battled Volkner, gotten kidnapped by a poacher and by Team Galactic, defeated Roark and Byron in a double battle, met Arceus, picked flowers, battled Team Galactic and gotten knocked out

by Vileplume"all together. I was slowly coming up with battle strategies just for Cyndaquill, knowing how to battle with it, how to work as a team. I knew what it liked, what it didn't like, what made it laugh and what made it cry. I _knew _Cyndaquill!

I looked up at FlareBlaze, sitting there on Jake's shoulder. At its sleek orange fur, those hands who could deal a devastating Scratch attack. I knew its moves, I knew its stats, I knew good battle strategies for it"but I didn't actually know FlareBlaze. But the way it had teased Cyndaquill"I didn't like that. It seemed almost mean.

I looked back down at Cyndaquill who met my eyes with its own, pleading.

_"__Cyndaaa?"_

It didn't want to go with Jake. It wanted to stay with me. I smiled.

Looking up at Jake I replied: "No thanks. I appreciate the offer, but I already have a best friend. Cyndaquill."

****End book two****

End
file.